Mahima Dharma



Bhagirathi Nepak

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BHAGIRATHA PRAKASHANA

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PART - I
INTRODUCTION

MAHIMA DHARMA AND MAHIMA GOSAIN

'Mahima' means 'Supreme' higher than which nothing exists. The founder of this cult was called Mahima Gosain or Alekha Swami. It is believed by the followers of Mahima Cult that formless Brahma from the void or Shunya had come down to earth as Mahima Gosain to establish Mahima Dharma.

The Mahima cult is strictly and solely occupied with knowledge of the self and it is claimed that Mahima Gosain has imparted full knowledge about self.

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Orissa during 19th century in the context of the Indian renaissance and the social and political changes in the offing all over the world was a virgin soil for the rise of Mahima Dharma, the principles of which come in opposition to orthodox Hinduism and Hindu social and religious rites and customs. Bhima Bhoi described "Bijatiya hela jahun ude hele Mahabahu, Jatiya Karibe sabu jete bhagata". When people were outcasted, "Mahabahu Mahima Gosain" appeared to bring those outcasted people to caste. Thus one can see how Mahima Dharma became popular.

Mahima Cult was not an isolated movement. Sadhu Sunder Das who died in 1838 had already established an Ashram at Kujibar near Chowdwar and denounced idolatry and caste system.

Even earlier the conception of the void, shunyabad of Mahima Cult was echoed in the writings of Panchasakha, Chaitanya Das, Chandramani Das, Dwarika Das and Ratna Das of Orissa.

The period from 1862 to 1876 recorded rapid spread of the Mahima Cult under the direct guidance of its founder Mahima Gosain.

It may be mentioned that Mahima Gosain attained Siddhi (realisation) in the year 1862 at Kapilas, Dhenkanal and breathed his last in the year 1876.

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It is known from history that Orissa faced an unprecedented famine during 1866. There were sorrows and suffering on account of death, destitution and desertion. Economic depression was accompanied with moral degradation. In addition, there was the threatened conversion to Christianity. A situation of this kind brings to focus the social relevance of the Mahima Cult.

Also Mahima movement stood as a barrier to the spread of Christianity in general and particularly among the uneducated rural folk of Orissa. There is no consideration of caste, creed, colour, occupation, social status, prestige, power, position and wealth for admission to the Mahima faith. Hence people joined this faith without hesitation.

Assessment of Mahima Cult and Mahima Gosain by scholars

Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, National Professor of India in Humanities, assesses the Mahima Cult of Orissa as comparable to the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bengal, with Sikhism in the Punjab and Kabir panth in Northern India and with Arya Samaj in Punjab and North India.

Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh speaks of the founder of the Mahima Cult as - "The unfavourable environment out of which this iconoclast and heretic sprang up, and the success with which he(Mahima Gosain) tried to establish a new moral order on earth through self culture and ethical discipline, sternly eschewing the worship of any external object, make this obscure, illiterate man out of the jungle-lands of Orissa, one of the most daring thought leaders of India.

Sri. M.N. Das former vice-chancellor, Utkal University writes as following in his preface to the book 'Mahima Dharmadhara' by Prof. Satrughna Nath.

"Mahima Swami, the founder of Mahima Dharma who became a revealed soul in 1826, represents that aspect of the Nineteenth century Indian renaissance described as the Spiritual Awakening.

Unlike the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and the Arya Samaj who were deeply influenced by the rational out look of the modern west and played the role of socio-religious reformers, Mahima Swami's inspiration emanated from Revelation and spiritual experiences as confirmed in eternal India's sole consciousness.

The Swami's Dharma rested on indigenous foundations and had nothing to do with external forces.

Self-revealed and self-enlightened as He was, the swami laid the foundation of the Alekha Mahima Dharma for the spiritual awakening of the people at the grassroots.

Mahima Gosain is Mahima

Biswanath Baba wrote in the preface to "philosophy of Mahima Dharma Vol. I that 'Mahima Swami' is Mahima (Glory) of "Eka

Adwitiya Pravu Parama Brahma" residing in great void, Mahanityapura. The entire world of animal life originates from Him. The different incarnations who appeared in the world in different forms spread faiths and cults in their own names. But till this time, there was no religion characterising the original primordial Satya Mahima. For this reason, the Parama Abyakta Parama Brahma Mahima Prabhu revealed himself on the earth as Mahima.

Bhima Bhoi's view

Bhima Bhoi the 'Adi kabi' (first poet) of Mahima cult has mentioned as following in his famous work entitled 'Nirveda sadhana'-

"Seje Anadi Avadhuta, Dharanti Vinna Vinna mata "

means, He (Mahima gosain) is Anadi, Avadhuta and holds or adopts different views and practices various religious sects and presents them in Mahima Cult.

He (Mahima Gosain) is further said to be the Avatara or incarnation of ocean-dwelling God (Khhira Sindhu Basi).

Having come to the earth from the ocean of milk, Mahima Gosain became a supreme teacher and preacher .

In 97th Boli of Stuti chintamani, Bhima Bhoi says, 'Although I adore and worship such a great religion based on truth and whose name is supreme, every thing is being rendered futile, inspite of the initiation and instructions of the Lord, the dweller of the ocean of milk, I am surprised to hear that his words become ineffective (97-2 and 3)

In 16th Boli of 'Stuti Chintamani" Bhima Bhoi has referred to several actions of the Lord Vishnu such as, the war of the elephant and the alligator, the female deer in the forest fire, abduction of Sita and her confinement in the Ashok Garden, Undressing of Draupadi and so on, and all these activities are alluded to Mahima Gosain, thus equating him with Vishnu. At one place Bhima Bhoi has identified Mahima Gosain with Krishna and Jagannath who are taken to be the different manifestations of Vishnu (Stuti Chintamani 29/12,13)

In the 10th Boli of 'Stuti Chintamani' Mahima Gosain is equated with all the incarnations with slight deviation like Matsya (Fish), Kurma (Tortoise), Rohi Matsya (in place of Varaha or Boar), Narasingha (Lion), Parasurama, Vamana, Ramachandra, Krushna, Darubrahma (Jagannath) and Kalki. (x)

(x) Analysed by Prof. Prahallad Pradhan.

As regards Kalki Avatara, Bhima Bhoi explains in Stuti Chintamani (10/10) - "Unjust actions were spreading widely all over the worlds, the four-fold religion was disappearing and, therefore, the incarnation of Kalki in Vaishnavite garment took place.

Kalki is not described here with his traditional dress, holding a sword in his hand and riding on a horse. It appears from the passage that, Mahima Gosain himself appeared in Kalki avatara for redressing the suffering, the suffering of the people.

But at the same time he (Bhima Bhoi) has described Mahima Gosain as "Ajoni Sambhuta".

The Mahima Cult of Orissa

Dr. Satrughana Nath in his work "Mahima Dharmadhara"" (page - 9) has stated as follows.

We remained under the foreign domination for over two hundred years. As a result, wide-spread poverty, squalor, inaction, illiteracy, fatalism and helplessness kept the society under their full grip. Consequently the moral fibre and fabria of the social and cultural life was badly shaken. 'Bhakti' instead of becoming a pure, un-alloyed and spontaneous flow of the heart was used as an instrument for the gratification of one's self seeking craving and indulgence. The offering of sacrifices, human and animal, in cash or kind seem to have flourished. Poets and writers emphasised the importance of witchery (Mantra Jantra) and sacrifice of animals leading to the fulfilment of unfulfilled desires to such an extent that they remained in our social system and constitute the core of the evil practices, superstitions and obscurantist ideas. They have continued to stay with us till today despite the scientific age and even scientific education.

In such a situation, Mahima swami appeared on the scene with his tenets of Niskama Bhakti, Samarpita Karma, Satya Marga and sunya Brahma Nama. He discarded sorcery and witchcraft (Mantra Jantra, Guni Garedi) and other tantric practices generally adopted as an easy means of the fulfilment of individual selfish desires and also found inevitable in a state of social insecurity arising out of moral deprivation and illiteracy.

"The social order in the pre and during nineteenth century was marked by suppression, oppression and subjugation of the common man. The sense of inferiority ruled supreme, in all aspects of life including religion. To put in the language of Prachya Darshana, due to 'Abidya' and 'Maya', the individual lost sight of 'Satya' and was lost in the plurality of images, idols and forms of worship. He

was constantly cowed down and felt cursed as it were. A sense of guilt haunted him and so he bowed down his head and sought blessings from any source they were coming.

Mahima Swami being Himself satya, eternally true for all ages all over the world showed the way to 'Bidya' i.e. 'Brahma Bidya', 'Satyam', 'Jnanam', 'Ananta brahma' and Himself remained beyond 'Maya' (cosmic illusion),

Thus the individual became morally bold and gained identity with "Parama Brahma Paramatma". The common man resorted to 'Sastanga Sharan' and looked at 'Shunya', 'Shunya Mahashunya', high above the sky with hands folded above his head."

The disciples of this cult believe in 'Avatara'. They believe that Mahima Swami was himself 'Avatari' and did not undergo the process of birth of human being (Ajoni Sambhuta) but came from the void or Shunya, assumed the shape of a human being, and after preaching about the cult returned to the void. He has no birth or death.

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The disciples of Mahima cult do not believe in gods and Goddesses and are opposed to worship of idols or images. Speaking about this Bhima Bhoi has recorded in 'Stuti Chintamani'--

"I do not worship the Gods and Goddesses nor the earthen and stone idol. I meditate on you alone in all earnestness seeking salvation of my soul'.

Again - *" Foolishly people worship gods, fall prostrate and seek protection, promising sweets and other stuffs, They do not remember Him who builds up body and soul and entreat the wooden image to the saviour.*
The animate seeks relationship with the inanimate;
What a folly !
Forgetting Him of the void
Who gives body and soul
How silly !"

The Mahima cult also recognises no caste barriers. All are admitted equally to its fold. All are regarded as sons and daughters of Parama Brahma and are equally entitled to worship Him. The Param Brahma is one and there is no second.

He is Alekh or without form, Niranjana or eternal and is without any characteristics (Nirguna).

Mahima cult is based on principles of renunciation or Sannyasa. They seek withdrawal from worldly matters.

The Sannyassis are expected to be possessed of high moral standard. About them it is said in Stuti Chintamani-

"Enduring like earth, Sweet and soft spoken, pacific, kind and merciful,
Ocean-like intelligence and wisdom,
And then only can one be called a saint, a noble soul.
Conscience like the sky expressive of Brahma
Speech full of knowledge.
One with the universe in his realisation.
Then only is he a yogi, a sage."

The cult also admits of worldly devotees as Ashrita and prescribes for them a sort of a code of conduct to be observed. Bhima Bhoi refers to the code of conduct and says-

"Conquer passion, anger, greed and attachment by knowledge.
Keep off violence, deceipt, crookedness and discord; avoid them all.
Covet not for others wealth, others wives,
Remember one and only one Guru Brahma and be you called wise."

Again- *Always live a life of truth, kindness,*
Peace and simplicity.

The sense of pride arising out of caste, knowledge, wealth etc. should be avoided.

The gruhis (Ashrita) must practice celibacy and have sexual intercourse according to the menstrual period of the wife. Other women should be treated as mother.

The prominent features of the code of conduct are -

(1) Idol worship is firmly discarded. No food offered to a deity is to be accepted.
(2) All men are equal. Caste is a taboo. Food offered by a Brahmin, a Dhoba (Washerman) or a barber is not accepted.
(3) The tulsi plant is not to be worshipped
(4) No food during night hours in between sun set and sun rise.
(5) Prayer twice a day, an hour or more before sunrise and soon after sunset.
(6) Speak in truth and move in truth.

The importance of "Guru" is recognised in almost each religion of India. But special importance is attached to the word 'Guru' in Mahima cult which regards Parama Brahma as the one and the only guru. That is why, Parama Brahma is also called Guru Brahma.

To merge the individual existence in Parama Brahma is the aim and object of Mahima cult.

The bhakta (disciple) looks at his Guru as Arupa, Anakara, Alekha, Mahima, Brahma etc.

Brahma and Mahima are one and the same. Parama Brahma is as Mahima revealed Himself.

The Philosophy of Mahima Dharma

The central philosophy on which Mahima Dharma is founded is that, "the ultimate reality is one and the only one',

This theory of supreme reality is known in Indian Philosophy as 'Advaitabad'.

Advaitabad has been the doctrine of many great philosophers like Shankar (9th century), Ramanuja (11th century) and others.

Shankara's Advaitabad known as Nirbishes says that 'Brahma or ultimate reality is one and the only one. He is the one truth, the only reality and everything else is 'Maya' or illusion. The world we are in, has no reality at all. He says-

"Brahma Satya, Jagat Mithya."

"Brahma is Vidya and the world is Avidya".

Ramanuja believes with Shankar that God is one and the only one. But the world he has created is also a truth and not Maya or illusion.

Brahma is true, so how can his creation be untrue ?

The whole world of creation 'lives and moves and has its being in Him'.

The world is a part of Brahma, it is in Brahma and it has a real existence in Brahma.

This is Ramanuja's **Visistha Advaitabad** or the special theory of Advaitabad.

According to Biswanath Baba, Mahima Dharma's Advaitabad is **Visuddha Advaitabad** or 'Pure Advaitabad'.

It is based on both Shankara's and Ramanuja's theory, but it has woven round it a new and beautiful pattern.

It says, Brahma is Advaita. He is one and only one and their is no duality.

But the world He has created is not Maya.

The world has a separate existence but only as Brahma's Mahima or glory. Brahma is not limited by his created world.

He is beyond time and space, beyond life and death, beyond all senses, all symbols and all attributes. He is Alekh.

Yet all the attributes are in Him.

Mahima cult

The Mahima cult is a revivalism of the Vedantic thrust and a reformist movement with its centre in the rural areas and with rural folk whose wisdom dwells within non-literate forms.

Mahima Gosain is treated as 'Avatari' (creator) and not as 'Avatara' created by Avatari, with Jnana (Knowledge) as Khadga (Sword) to dispel Kali Yuga with its accompaniments of all pervading illusion, lust, greed, self glory for inflicting its untold miseries, sorrows and sufferings on the silent majority etc. as expressed by Prof. S.Nath in his book Mahima Dharmadhara (Page - 5).

PART - II : PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY : THE MEANING

Desire for knowledge springs from the rational nature of man. Philosophy is an attempt to satisfy this reasonable desire Hence philosophy in its widest sense means, "Love of knowledge." It tries to know things that immediately and remotely concern man.

While the lower beings struggle more or less blindly without any conscious plan and purpose and work by instinct, super being i.e. man uses the superior gift of his intellect to understand the conditions and meaning of the struggle for existence of life and to devise plans and instruments to ensure success. He wishes to lead his life in the light of his knowledge of himself and the world. He wants to know-

1. What is the real nature of man ?
2. What is the end of this life ?
3. What is the nature of this world in which he lives.
4. Is there any creator of this world ?
5. How should man live in the light of his knowledge of himself, the world and God ?

Philosophy deals with problems of this nature.

Solutions of philosophical problems, "like what is the ultimate cause of the world ? Does God exists ? what is the nature of God ?", can not be obtained by observation. The Philosopher must employ his imagination and reasoning, and find out answers consistent with truths already established by experience.

Philosophy proceeds from the known to the unknown.

The foundation of philosophy is experience, and the chief tool used is reason.

In Indian philosophy authority or the testimony of reliable persons and scriptures also forms the basis of philosophy.

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"Men live in accordance with their philosophy of life, their conception of the world. This is true even of the most thoughtless. It is impossible to live without a metaphysic. The choice that is given to us is not between some kind of metaphysic and no metaphysic, it is always between a good metaphysic and a bad metaphysic, says Aldous Huxley in his book "Ends and Means", (page 252). Philosophy in its widest means "Love of knowledge" and aims at knowledge of truth.

As philosophy aims at knowledge of truth, it is termed in Indian literature "The vision of truth", i.e. "darshana". Every Indian school holds, in its own way, that there can be a direct realization of truth (tattva-darshana).

There are many different schools in India and their views differ sometimes very widely, yet each school takes care to learn the views of all others and do not come to any conclusion before considering thoroughly what others had to say and how their points could be met.

The schools or system of Indian philosophy are divided into two broad classes-

(i) orthodox (astika)

(ii) heterodox (nastika)

In modern Indian languages, astika and nastika generally mean theist and atheist respectively.

Astika and Nastika

The orthodox (astika) group has six chief philosophical systems, popularly known as "Sada-darshna". These are -

Mimamsa, Vedanta, Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya and Vaisesika.

These are regarded as orthodox or Astika, not because they believe in God, but because they accept the authority of the Vedas. The mimamsa and the Sankhya do not believe in God as the creator of the world, yet they are called orthodox (astika) because they believe in the authoritativeness of the Vedas- says S.Radhakrishnan, the eminent philosopher.

Under the other class of heterodox (nastika) systems, the chief three are the schools of the materialists like the "Carvakas", "The Buddhas" and "The Jainas". These three schools do not believe in the authority of vedas.

The Vedas

The Vedas are the earliest available records of Indian literature.

The vedic literature is generally divided in to three parts , i.e. Samhita, Brahmana and Upanisad.

The Vedic hymns or mantras are compiled in the different samhitas viz, RK- Yajus and Sama.

The Indian thought, specially philosophical speculation is greatly influenced by the Vedas.

Vedanta

"Vedanta" literally means the end of Vedas. Primarily the word 'Vedanta' stood for the Upanisads, though afterwards its denotation widened to include all thoughts developed out of the Upanisads.

The Upanisads

The Upanisads may be regarded as the end of the Vedas as (i) These were last literary products of the Vedic period, (ii) In respect of study, the Upanisads came last and (iii) They mark the culmination of the Vedic speculation.

The Upanisads were regarded as the inner or secret meanings (Rahasya) of the Vedas. Hence their teachings were sometimes called "Vedopanisad" or the mystery of the Vedas vide Taittiriya Upanisad. i. ii.

T he Upanisads are many and the most important are 108 in number. They developed in the different Vedic schools (Sakhas) at different times and places and offered different out look. Hence it was felt necessary to systematise the different teachings and to harmonise them. Badarayana's "Brahma-sutra" or "Vedanta-sutra" under took the task.

The Schools of the Vedanta

Badarayana's sutras, being brief, were liable to different interpretations.

Various commentaries came to be written to elaborate the doctrines of the Vedanta in their own light. Each tried to justify its position as the only one consistent with the revealed texts (srutis) and the sutras.

The author of each of these chief commentaries (bhasya) became the founder of a particular school of the vedanta. Thus we have the schools of SANKARA, RAMANUJA, MADHVA, VALLABHA, NIMBARKA and many others.

The main point of difference

The main point on which the schools of the Vedanta are divided is -

"What is the nature of the relation between the self (JIVA) and God (Brahma)"

MADHVA's dualism (dvaita)

The great philosopher MADHVA hold that the self and God are two different entities. This is called dualism.

SANKARA's monism (advaita)

The eminent philosopher SANKARA holds that the Jibv and God are absolutely identical. This view is called monism or advaita.

RAMANUJA's qualified monism (Visistadvaita)

The Great philosopher Ramanuja's view is that Jiva and God (Brahma) both are identical only in some special sense.

SATYA MAHIMA DHARMA

Mahima Dharma is generally known as "Satya Mahima Dharma". "Mahima Gosain" founded and preached this Dharma as "Satya Sanatan Mahima Dharma". Being a branch of the Sanatan Hindu Dharma, it is named as Satya Sanatan Mahima Dharma.

Mahima Dharma originated in Orissa in the beginning of 19th century. Mahima Gosain, a sanyasi is said to be the founder of this Mahima Dharma. He wrote no book and preached his teachings by oral instructions. But a considerable knowledge of his teachings is handed down to us by the writings of Bhima Bhoi, one of his very eminent disciples. Later on, Biswanath Baba did serious work on it in his famous books, "Satya Mahima Dharma Pratipadaka" in two volumes and "Alekh Param- Brahma Darsanam".

Biswanath Baba claims in his publication entitled "Alekh Param Brahma Darsana" that the preaching of Mahima Gosain are all in accordance with the sayings of the holy scriptures like Vedas and Upanisads (Purvardha, Amukha, Page-1). This is a very significant point as by this alone the religious movement carried by the Mahimaites is characterised as a movement within the Hindu fold and is neither anti-vedic nor Budhistic in essence.

Biswanath Baba further asserts that the Satya Mahima Dharma is fundamentally based on "Alekh Param Brahma Darsanam" or "Visuddhadvaita Vada" Vide" Prak-Kathana " by Prof. R. Pati, page X, Sankara's Advaitism is named as "Nirvisesadvaita vada" by him.

Mahima Dharma which is philosophically categorised as "Visuddhadvaita-Brahmavada" has its origin in Upanisadic literature.

Some of the problems of the Upanisads are

(i) What is the reality from which all things originate, by which all live and into which all dissolve when destroyed ?

(ii) What is Brahman ? What is Atman ? etc.

"At first there was the Atman alone" says the Aitareya(1.1.1) & Brhadaranyaka (1.4.1)

"All this is Atman"- says Chhandogya (7.25.2)

"There was only being (i.e. sat) at the beginning, It was one without a second" (Chhandogya 6.2.1)

"All this Brahman" say Mundaka 2.2.11 and Chhandogya 3.14.1.

Brahman and Atman are used synonymously in these different contexts.

"This self is the Brahman"- Brhadaranyaka 2.5.19.

"I am Brahman"- Brhadaranyaka, 1.4.10 (Aham Brahma Asmi).

All attempt is made to help man discover the Real self.

Realization of the self (Atma-Vidya or Atma- jnana) is regarded as the highest of all knowledge (Para - Vidya). All other knowledge and learning are inferior to it and are called apare-vidya.

All Upanisads appear to be unanimous in holding that "Atman (Brahman or sat) is both the creator and the material cause of the world".

It is necessary to mention here that in the upanisads, and later Vedanta literature, the word "Brahman" is used for the highest principle or Absolute Reality, as well as for the creator of the world, the object of worship.

Almost all the Vedantins believe that the knowledge of the existence of God is obtained not by reasoning but from the testimoney of the revealed scriptures. The presence of God can be realised by devout souls only.



DHARMA AND DARSANA

I feel it necessary to quote the following from the article of Sri S.K. Mohanty entitled "Mahima Dharma, some observation" Published in Mahima Dharma - Darshan" DAV College Koraput. "Essence of religion is faith. Truth of religion is not open to argument. Beyond the region of thought, beyond the duality of good and evil, space and time limitation the mystic sees by a sort of flash, a light that he feels but fails to express.

But the philosopher is not like a religious preacher. The method of philosophy is different. The faith and belief being essential to religion, method of philosophy is logical, analytic and critical. The philosopher has a questioning mind. He is not expected to take anything for granted.

The Philosopher and the religious preacher might arrive at the same conclusion but their methods will be different.

The Philosopher arrives at a conclusion by analysis, logic and dialectic. He tries to find out the rational behind any claim that is made. Whereas laws and codes of a religion are considered as commandments.

But as many saints in India are both religious preachers and philosophers, this has led to a confusion between philosophy and religion. Out of this confusion arises a two-fold consequence. Philosophy when misunderstood as religion is identified with either mysticism or figurative thinking.

When religion is confused with philosophy the result is that it becomes abstract and goes beyond the reach of common man for whom religion is meant. It becomes the possession of those who engage themselves in abstract logical argument. Out of this confusion arises a two-fold consequence.

Philosophy when misunderstood as religion is identified with either mysticism or figurative thinking.

Thus monasteries instead of concentrating on preaching the truths and spreading the religion for which they are originally made becomes centres of hair splitting controversy, the saints taking pride by refuting the opponents.

Thus this essential difference between the two must be borne in mind in all such discussions."

At last Sri Mohanty has offered his opinion saying, "Mahima movement to my mind is a religious cult and not a philosophy.

The truth which Mahima Gosain preached are intallible not because it is what the Upanisads, the Gita and Advaita Vedanta said, but because these are said by Guru himself who being a "Siddha Purusa" experienced the truth in his life. xx This fact is in accordance with the purpose of religion.

The purpose of religion is, at the first place , to create confidence in the hearts of people and not to lead them to scepticism. This is best done when truths of a religion are delivered in the form of commandments or revealed truths which are claimed to be ineffable.

The Guru can not err, because He is God incarnate.

Every religion believes its preacher to be enlightened."

"Sects have given rise to further sects, as the Gurus have multiplied in number. Most of the Gurus have shown more interest in forming sects of their own than in God-realization, going along their own particular paths. And the common people have remained almost in the same ignorances and incapacities through the ages. XX Each religious sect has tried to excel out the other in becoming worldly-wise and profane." (x)

THE MONISM IN VEDAS & UPANISADAS

Belief in many gods is called "polytheism."

Of the three Vedas, RK, Yajus and Sama, the first is the basic work, the second two contain RK hymns (Mantras) in different arrangements to suit their application to sacrifices. The hymans of the Rg-veda mostly consist of Praises of the different deities e.g.. Agni, Mitra, Varuna, Indra and so on. Hence the vedas are often said to be polytheistic.

But there is a peculiarity in Vedic thought that makes the above view doubtful. Each of many gods, when praised, is extolled by the hymn as the supreme God, the creator of universe and the lord of all gods, Max Muller, the eminent philosopher, therefore, thinks that polytheism is not an appropriate name for such a belief, and he coins a new word 'henotheism' to signify this.

According to many writers, there is a development noticeable in Vedic thought and they believe that the idea of God gradually developed from poly-theism through henotheism, ultimately to monotheism, i.e., belief in one God.

(x) A Glimpse into Oriya Literature (p/22) by Sri C.R. Das.

Indian monotheism retains the belief that though God is one, He has various manifestations in the many Gods, any one of which may be worshipped as a form of the supreme deity. Even today we have in India the divergent cults- Saivism, Vaisnavism and the like flourishing side by side and almost every one of them is at bottom based on a philosophy of one supreme God-perhaps even one all inclusive reality says Satischandra Chatterjee in his book entitled "An Introduction to Indian Philosophy" (1948) Page - 401.

Though many of the important elements of the Vedantas are to be found in the Rg-Veda, they are presented in a poetic way without reasoning and arguments.

But Philosophy proper must be based on explicit reasoning and arguments.

The first attempt at Philosophical speculation is to be found in some Upanisads, where problems about self, God and the World are clearly put and discussed. The problems of such Upanisads are-

(i) What is the reality from which all things originate, by which all live and into which all dissolve when destroyed ?

(ii) What is that by knowing which everything can be known ?

(iii) What is Brahman ? What is Atman ? etc.

The Upanisadic mind was already steeped in the belief that there is an all-pervasive reality underlying all things which arise from, exist in and return to it; that there is some reality by knowing which immortality can be attained.

The name given to this Reality is sometimes "Brahman" (God), sometimes "Atman" (Self), sometimes simply "Sat" (Being).

(i) "At first there was the Atman alone"- Say Aitaraya (1.1.1) and Brhadaranyaka (1.1.4)

(ii) "All this is Atman" says Chhandogya (7.25.2)

(iii) "Atman being known ...every thing is known" says Brhadaranyaka (4.5.6)

(iv) "There was only Being (Sat) at the beginning, it was one without a second"- Chhandogya (6.2.1)

(v) "All this is Brahman" - Mundaka (2.2.11) and Chhandogya (3.14.1)

(vi) "This self is the Brahman"- Brhadaranyaka (2.5.19)

(vii) "I am Brahman" - Brhadaranyaka (1.4.10.)

The text translation are respectively-

"Om atma va idam eka eva agre asit."

"Atma eva idam agre asit"

"Atma eva idam Sarvam."

Atmani Khalu are drste srute mate vijnate idath sarvath viditam."

"Sad eva saumya idam agra asit, ekam eva advitiyam."

"Sarvath khalu idam brahma." (Chhand)

"Brahma eva idath visvam." (Mund)

"Ayam atma brahma."

"Aham brahma asmi."

The Upanisads shift the centre of interest from the Vedic Gods to the self of man. They analyse the self, distinguish between its outer husk and its inner reality. The body, the senses, the mind (mana), the intellect and pleasures arising out of them are all tested and found to be passing, changeful modes, not the permanent essence of the self.

The real self is pure consciousness and also infinite. The real self is called Atman. The self of man is identical with the self of all beings (sarva-bhutatma) and therefore, with God or Brahman.

Realisation of the self (Atma-Vidya or Atma-jnana) is regarded as the highest of all knowledge (para - vidya), all other knowledge and learning being inferior to it (apara-vidya).

It is only through the realisation of the self or Brahman that rebirth can be stopped. One who truly realises his unity with the "Immortal Brahman", realises immortality.

The Upanisads conceive Brahman not only as the pure ground of all reality and consciousness, but also as the ultimate source of all joy.

Brahma Sutra of Badarayana

The accounts of creation given in the different Upanisads do not exactly tally. But all appear to be unanimous in holding that Atman (i.e. Brahman or Sat) is both the creator and the material cause of the world.

The Brahma-sutra of Badarayana attempts to systematize and ascertain the real views of the revealed texts. But its brief statements themselves admit of different meanings.

Subsequent writers who commented on the Brahma-sutra give their own interpretation to the Upanisads and the sutras vary clearly and elaborately.

Of the different rival schools that came into existence in this way, that of Sankara is the most popular. Next comes the visistadvita school of Ramanuja. These two are the main schools of the Vedanta.

Both Sankara and Ramanuja agree with the Upanisadic view that "All is Brahman" or "sarvam khalu idam Brahma" and matter and mind are not independent realities but grounded in the same Brahman. Both are therefore, believers in one Absolute. Both follow Badarayana and reject other views.

ACHARYA SANKARA

Sankara lived for 32 years only and proved himself to be the eminent philosopher of India and the world as well.

It is said that he could learn the four vedas, i.e. RK, Sam, Yaju and Atharva at the age of eight years. He had finished all the sastras at the age of twelve and completed writing all his vasyas at the age of sixteen. He died at the age of 32 years.

Among his countless writings, the following are most important -

1. Brahma sutra Vasya
2. Gita Vasya
3. Upanisad Vasya
4. Mandukyakarika Vasya
5. Sanatsujatiya Vasya
6. Saundarjya Lahari
7. Upades-Sahasri
8. Vibeka-Chudamani
9. Moha-Mudgara
10. Charpata- Panjarika etc.

The sum and substance of his philosophy is -

"Brahman satya Jagat Mithya
Jibo Brahmaika Napara."

In Rg. Veda (6.47.18) the one Indra (God) is said to appear in many forms, through the powers of creating illusion (maya).

The Svetasvatara clearly states that the origin (Prakriti) of the world lies in the magical power (maya) of God (4.10)

What is Maya ?

"Maya as a power of God is indistinguishable from Him, just as the burning power of fire is from the fire itself.

It is by this that God, the great magician, conjures up the world-show with all its wonderful objects. The appearance of this world is taken as real by the ignorant, but the wise who can see through it finds nothing but God, the one reality behind its illusory show.

When a magician makes one coin appear as many to us, it is an illusion for us, the perceivers, and not for the conjurer.

Illusion (maya) is the product of our ignorance. This illusion prevents us from seeing the real nature of the thing and which makes us see something else in its place.

For the magician, the illusion is only a conjuring will by which his spectators are deceived, and not himself. " - (Indian Philosophy, S.Rradhakrishna).

These are the examples through which Sankara's Advaitabad (monism) is explained.

In the light of the foregoing examples, maya (illusion), the cause of the world appearance, may also be understood from two stand points -

(i) For God, maya is only the will to create appearance. It does neither effect God nor does it deceive Him.

(ii) The ignorant people are deceived by it and see many objects instead of one Brahman or God.

Hence Maya is an illusion - producing ignorance. In this respect maya is called "ajnana" or "avidya"

Sankara speaks of "maya" as the power of God. But this creative power, according to him, is not a permanent character of God, but only a free will which can be given up at will. According to Sankara, Maya is not a distinct entity in Brahman, inseparable from it as the burning power is from fire, or will is from the mind that wills.

Sankara's theory of creation is known as "Vivartabad". It is explained by the illusory modification of any substance, as of the rope into snake. It is not parinama-vada", i.e. by the real modification of Prakriti (milk in to curd).



RAMANUJACHARYA

Ramanujacharya is the founder and propagator of Visistadvaitabad school of philosophy. He appeared between 1037 to 1137 A.D. Not being satisfied with the advaita literature he entered in to Vaisnaba literature and became an eminent scholar in Vaisnaba Sastra.

Following Badarayana he has composed 'Srivasya' on Brahma sutra. The following are also his well known sastras -

1. Gita Vasya
2. Vedanta Dipa
3. Vedanta Sara
4. Vedartha Sangraha.

Both Sankara and Ramanuja take their stand on the Upanisadic view that "All is Brahmań" (Sarvam khalu idam Brahma) and matter and mind are not independent realities but grounded in the same Brahman. Both are, therefore, monsists or believers in one absolute.

Ramanuja following the svetasvatara upanisad also speaks of Maya as the power of God like Sankara. But this creative power, according to Ramanuja is a permanent character of God. It is not only a free will which can, therefore, be given up at will as Sankara claims.

Ramanuja thinks that the mystery of creation is beyond human intellect and we are to accept the accounts of creation given in the scriptures.



PART - III

MAHIMA DHARMA

Mahima Dharma originated in Orissa in the beginning of nineteenth century. Mahima Gosain is the founder of this new Dharma. He wrote no books and preached his teachings by oral instruction. But a considerable knowledge of his teachings is handed down to us by the writings of Bhima Bhoi, one of his very eminent disciples.

Prof. S. Nath in his article "Mahima Swami ; life and teaching" has written that - "The great prabuddha guru Mahima Swami founded and preached a religion entitled "Satya Sanatan Mahima Dharma". It is satya and Sanatan. Being a branch of the Sanatan Hindu Dharma, it is ever true and eternally true. In essence, it is for mankind and of mankind. xx

The great guru, in line with the spirit of the age and of religion, left no account of his own life and of the faith. The masses in the country both rural and urban covering almost all castes and communities who are apparently illiterate but truly wise refer to "Guru Anja Niyam Nistha" for regulating their conduct and house hold practices. The sadhus and Gruhis are guided alike by the commandments of the Guru carried over from one generation to another."

According to Mahima Dharma, Biswaguru Mahima Swami is himself Nirakar, Nirguna Param Brahma. Bhima Bhoi's Bhajans and his epoch-making "Stuti Chintamani" pay eloquent evidence to the Brahma realising Himself. He is described as 'Ajonisamvuta'.

The great Bhakta looks at his guru as Arupa, Anakar, Alekh, Mahima Brahma.

Brahma and Mahima are one and same- Parama Brahma's Mahima revealing Himself.

Further it is stated that Mahima religion is as old as the Sanatan Hindu Dharma. The religion has its origin in upanisadic literature.

Mahima Swami who is ever eternal and ever true assumed the human form in the early part of the nineteenth century only to re-emphasise the Adwaita Darshanam. His Dharma rested on indigenous foundations and had nothing to do with external forces. Self-revealed and self-enlightend as he was, he laid the foundation of Mahima Dharma for the spiritual awakening of the people at the

grassroot. He is known as Arupa, Anakara, Adwitiya, Adimula for the creation, preservation and destruction which go on perennially through the ages. He is treated as omniscient and omnipresent.

In short, Mahima cult is a revivalism of the vedantic thrust and a reformist movement of Orissa.

The Mahima movement

As response to the challenge of the Christian missionaries bitter criticism of the Hindu socio-religious system, enlightened Indians took shelter under the anglicised "Brahma" movement.

The movement was popular among the educated people in general. But the orthodox section and the common people had nothing to do with it. The ordinary Hindu longed to see the appearance of a saint whose utterance would be based on the bedrock of realisation and whose movement would revitalise the traditional Hindu society with a new religious fervour.

The appearance of Ramakrishna Paramahansa in Bengal and Mahima Gosain in Orissa fulfilled such a need.

The "Mahima movement" is essentially indigenous in character. A large number of people in Orissa became devotees of the cult. It also spread to the neighbouring states like Bengal, Assam and Andhra in course of time.

The exponents of this cult neverlikedthe lime light of publicity and naturally their activities were shrouded in obscurity for a long time. In recent years, several publications have come out on the history, Philosophy and teachings of the Mahima Dharma. However a number of works on Mahima Dharma are still unpublished. They are generally available on palm leaf manuscript forms.

The history of the Mahima movement in Orissa in the 19th century

The early history of Mahima Gosain, the founder of Mahima Dharma was shrouded in obscurity due to lack of proper research.

He appeared for the first time in 1826 at Puri and gave up his worldly life in 1876 and was cremeted at Joranda in Dhenkanal district which is now regarded as the head quarters of the Mahima movement. For fifty years, Mahima Gosain lived as a true saint practising yoga, other forms of austerities and penances. Slowly a band of devoted followers gathered round him. The principal site of his austerities was Kapilas hill in the district of Dhenkanal.

The first convert to the Mahima cult was siddha Govinda Baba and Bhima Bhoi was the first philosopher poet of the cult,

who got the blessings of the Master and composed a large number of philosophical treatises.

Mahima Gosain travelled through out Orissa and instructed his followers in the worship of "Alekh Param Brahma".

There were a number of "Siddhas" of the cult who preached its tenets in Orissa and in some neighbouring states.

The hall mark of this religious movement was total renunciation on the part of the followers who adopted "Sanyasa". They were required to travel constantly, to beg not more than one meal from any house holder and not to stay more than one night in any village. They took only one principal meal in the day time and nothing in the night.

Even the principal centre of the Mahima Cult Joranda had no permanent provision for its maintenance.

In course of time, the number of followers of the "Mahima cult" increased considerably and they are now to be found not only in Orissa but also in Andhra, West Bengal, Assam, Madhya Pradesh etc. Besides the Sannyasis, there are lay devotees and the latter constitute the bulk of Mahima followers.

The followers of the Mahima Dharma like Brahma Samaj, believed in the worship and adoration of the Eternal, unsearchable and immutable being who is the author and preserver of the universe. He is "Alekha" (without description), Anakara (without shape), Anadi (without end).

Self-surrender to the Param Brahma or Sunya Purusa is the highest goal of the followers of the Mahima cult.

It does not prescribe rigid asceticism but lays stress on disciplined habits to control body and mind.

It does not recognise any distinction between caste, creed, colour or any such narrow social division of human beings.

Its aim is to unite all on the common platform of "Sunya Sadhana" or the worship of the void.

x x x

In the 19th century, the Mahima cult spread throughout Orissa and common people were very much attracted towards it. There is no doubt that it was a powerful force to counteract on the one hand. the movement of the Christian missionaries and on the other hand, the appeals of the anglicised Brahma movement.

Like the Ramkrishna mission movement it kindled new hopes in the minds of millions of Hindus who could aspire to find salvation in their own traditional system.

(Extract form the article Religious movement in Orissa in counteract 19th century by Prof. K.M. Patra.)

SATYA MAHIMA DHARMA

(Result of field investigation by Tribal research Bureau)

Field investigations were conducted during the months of November and December 1967 by visiting different areas to examine the impact of Satya Mahima Dharma on scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in Orissa. The study was initiated by late A. Das, the then Director, Tribal Research Bureau and was undertaken by Research officer Shrimati Kiran Bala Devi with the assistance of investigators under the guidance of Shri N.Das, Assistant Director, Tribal Research Bureau, Bhubaneswar. The report appeared in "Adibasi" Vol- X, 1968-69, number one - April 1968 issue. Portions relating to Satya Mahima Dharma otherwise known as Alekha Mahima Dharma are reproduced below. The report says-

"Satya Mahima Dharma otherwise known as Alekha Mahima Dharma or Kumbhipatia Dharma has its origin in Orissa.

It is a sect of Hinduism.

The sect is open for all Hindus irrespective of class, caste and sex. Many people belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have embraced this sect. xx

Satya Mahima Dharma

In vedic age, the vedic priests were polytheists worshipping a number of deities such as Indra, Baruna, Kubera etc. The ascety later on tried to find out one supreme God over all of them.

The term "Brahmo" was used for Him in Srimad Bhagabat Gita, one of the Hindu religious books. In Gita He is described as invisible, undestructible and eternal. He is supreme guardian of universe. Thirty-three crores of Hindu deities are guided by Him.

Hindus obey Brahmo and all other minor deities whereas Mahima Dharma is based on the philosophy of Brahmo worship only.

The later recognises minor deities but does not advocate to worship them on the ground that there is no necessity to satisfy all if one supreme guardian is satisfied. According to Mahima Dharma, Brahmo is one and only one. He is Alekha (Who can not be written, Anadi (without any beginning), Ananta (without any end) and Anakara (without any shape). One can get supreme bliss by

dedicating himself to Him. He is omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent. He can not be realised by ordinary sense organs. He is Sat (supreme Good), Chit (supreme consciousness) and Ananda (Supreme happiness). Thus Mahima Dharma preaches the theory of monotheism.

Ordinary men can not understand what is God unless it is given any shape. Hindus believe in idolatry.

Mahima Dharma preaches the theory of shapeless God, because no one has ever seen Him and so no shape can be imagined.

In vedic age "Homas" were being performed by the priests to appease deities. Animal sacrifice at first did not form a part of vedic ritual. Later on animal sacrifice was added. As a reaction to animal sacrifice many sects like Jainasim, Budhism took their origin in India. Satya Mahima Dharma is likewise a reactionary movement against animal sacrifices. The ways followed by Mahimaism to appeal God are prayer, performance of Homa and distribution of offerings among children. Children are pure, right and free from vices. Therefore, God stays with children.

Mahima Dharma recognises five cardinal virtues of veda, Upanishada and Gita. These are harmlessness, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity and non-acceptance. Brahma Charya, a life of celibacy for sanyasis and self-control for common people in sexual life are essential for Hindus. These cardinal virtues as stepping stone for realisation of God have been accepted by Mahima religion.

Mahima Dharma recognises gospels of Srimad Bhagabat Gita. It believes in "Give up all other religions and abandon thyself solely to my cares. Do not give for, I shall deliver you from all sins". Therefore people should commit themselves to his care. This religion advocates the search of eternal divine protection after getting which man does not return back to the world. Thus Satya Mahima Dharma is based on some principles of Veda, Upanishad and Gita. But they introduce themselves as "Nirbeda", the non-believers of Veda on the ground that animal sacrifice, polytheism sanctioned by Veda have been discarded by them. But they recognise Gita and its gospels as the guide line of the sect. It is a sect of Hinduism which is originated as its disciples believe to destroy all accreations gathered round the Hindu religion without destroying the core. It is known as "Satya Mahima Dharma", the true glorious religion.

Origin

One of the important socio-religious problem in India is the caste system, a complex institution of Hindu society. The society is stratified into various caste groups among whom social distances are maintained.

At first the society was divided in to four caste groups on the basis of division of labour and specialization of works. Brahmins were entrusted with the duty of worship of deity, kshyatriyas for defending country, Baisyas for trade and commerce and Sudras for all types of manual works. In course of time, these professions become hereditary and various castes emerged. Among these castes high social disparity was maintained. The Brahmins being the controlling authority of religion occupied the top most position in caste hierarchy. They were called high borns, and become the only agents through whom anything could be relayed to God. Other high borns like Kshyatriyas could enter into Hindu shrine but could not relay their difficulties or offer anything to God directly. A section of low borns called untouchables could not enter into Hindu shrines.

The tribals known as Anarya were not included in the Hindu society. It was not a problem of primitive tribes living in the isolated pockets surrounded by forest and hills, detacthed from the Hindu world. xxx

The nineteenth century was an age of renaissance for India, when Indians were enlightened with modern values and thoughts. In that era various movements on social, political and religious thoughts took place. Spread of education made people conscious. Caste system, a curse on the society was felt to be removed. With this background, Mahimaism was originated taking a bold step against caste prejudices by proclaiming equality of mankind before god. Hence Mahimaism is sometimes described as reactionary.

There is a common notion that Mahima Dharma has an aboriginal origin. Many common people do not know the real founder of this religion. Bhima Bhoi, one of the disciples became famous for his devotional songs and religious books depicting gospels of Mahimaism. He is said to be a kandha. Many believed him to be the founder of the sect and hence described it as a religion of the Kandha. Being misguided by the surname "Bhoi" which is used as such by a scheduled caste, and as maximum percentage of converts belong to various scheduled castes, it is also considered by common people as the religion of untouchable.

The disciples of Satya Mahima Dharma believe that Mahima Gosain, the founder of this sect, is a divine being. He was the

incarnation of great Brahma who came to this world to revive Hindu religion from the state of degeneration. Except some legends regarding his omnipotency, ominipresence and ascetic life, their literature is silent about his private life. He is believed to have descended from eternal space. xxx

We are still in dark about the personal life of the Mahima Gosain and his early associates. The present disciples also don't disclose about private life of these asceties. With great difficulty birth place and caste of 20 mendicants were gathered out of whom two were tribals and two scheduled castes. Majority of converts at that time were scheduled caste people though other caste people were also embracing this sect. For all these reasons it can not be concluded that Mahima Dharma is of tribal origin.

History and spread of Religion

In 19th century Orissa was divided into two parts, viz. Moghalbandi ruled by the Britishers and Gadjats ruled by native rulers.

Mahima Gosain first started his propagation work at Banki and then expanded to Khurda, Cuttack and Gadjat areas like Dhenkanal, Athagarh, Angul, Hindol etc. The rulers were permitting the religious preachers to spread their faith in their states. It was one of the duty of a good ruler to receive Sadhus and Sanyasis and to accord special facilities to them. As Mahima Dharma was taken as a sect of Hinduism, its sanyasis could get opportunity to receive the patronization of the rulers.

Mother of Shri Bhagirathi Bhramarabar Roy, the then ruler of Dhenkanal state was a great patron of Mahima Gosain for which some special facilities were accorded to him. As a result the main centre of Mahima sect was established at Joranda in Dhenkanal.

Other centres were established at Mahulapara in Dhenkanal, Malbaharpur in Banki, Khuntuni in Athagarh, Dalijoda and Dhamana in Khurda. People in these areas were attracted towards the sect in large number.

Towards the last part of his life, Mahima Gosain propagated his religion in different areas. He converted 92 persons as Balkaladhari Sanyasis and 80 persons as Kaupindhari sanyasis.

He constructed many Dhuni Mandiras out of which many were destroyed by himself after wards. xx

Gobinda Das

The chief disciple of Mahima sect was Gobinda Das, who like his guru was supposed to be possessed with divine power.

Due to his effort the religion expanded. It is noted in the Bengal district gazetteer, 1909, that "Alekha swami............and have revealed a new religion to 64 persons, the principal of whom was Gobinda Das, and it was chiefly owing to the exertion of the disciples that the religion was propagated.

BHIMS BHOI- Another important conversion was Bhima Bhoi xx brought up by a Kandha family of Rairakhol.

As regards his birth no authentic data is available. He himself confessed that he was a Kandha.

But as the legends go, a Kandha Dhaneswar by name of Madhupur village in Rairakhol got him from a palm grove in JATASINGHA village of Sonepur.

After the death of his adopted father, he earned his livelihood by husking paddy and rearing cattle.

It is said that due to blessings of Mahima Gosain, he acquired a considerable mental power and poetic genius.

He shifted his camp afterwards to Sonepur where he spent most of his life by propagating religion and writing scriptures on Mahima Dharma. xx

He was responsible for popularising Mahimaism in Sambalpur, Sonepur and Baudh area.

It is said that after the death of Mahima Gosain there was a set back of the sect. Many followers were reconverted but his associates were not accepted by the Hindu society as they were not observing caste rules. These disciples took responsibility of preaching religion.

Sections of Mahima Dharma Followers.

During the life time of Mahima Gosain the sect was divided into two sections, viz, kumbhipatias (who wear bark of Kumbhi tree) and Kanapatias (who wear red ochre dyed cloth).

At that time there was conflict among these sections.

The annual festivals held at Mahulpada and Joranda were generally attended by Kanapatias and Kumbhipatias respectively.

After the death of Mahima Gosain, his followers were divided in to three groups. They were known as - CHAPAN MURTIA, TETIS MURTIA and KODIE MURTIA according to number of sanyasis in the group.

A conflict took place between Chapan Murtia and Kodie Murtia when the former did not allow other groups to reside with them.

This Tetis Murtia and Kodie Murtia were deprived of Gadi property and the right to worship within the main temple.

Tetis Murtia group remained insignificant but Kodie Murtia filed a case against Chapan Murtia.

At last Kodie Murtia got compensation and right over the shrine. As they were living under a Mahal tree being driven out by Chapan Murtia before matha was constructed by them, they are known as Mahala Mathia. They are known as "Kaupuni Dhari Mahima Samaj" and Chhapan Murtia are known as "Bakala Dhari Mahima Samaj".

The conflict still continues.

Division of Mahima Dharma followers

The followers of Mahima Dharma may broadly be divided into two groups - sanyasi and Gruhi or Asrita.

The sanyasis have to renounce the worldly life. They follow methods of self mortification. They do not cut hair, beard or use oil and cosmetics. Brahmachrya, a life of celibacy is maintained strictly. It is essential for all sanyasis to devote life for realisation of truth. Sanyasis lead a life of wanderings to preach ideas and thoughts of the sect. They do not spend more than one night in a village and accept food only once from a particular house. The motto "Gharke muthe vikhya gramake Ratie" is followed by them for avoiding attachment to worldly life. They are forbidden to return to their own village to disclose anything about their private life or to own money and other property. Following the process of mortification they are to move form place to place on foot, and take food on leaf plate. Gruhis regard them as their spiritual guide.

Gruhis on other hand live in their homes and enjoy worldly life, with certain restrictions. A gruhi should enjoy sexual life once in a month on 8th day of his wife's menstrual period. The Gruhis wear red ochre dyed cloth as uniform of Mahima Dharma. If it is not possible on their part to wear this type of cloth always, they must wear it atleast at the time of worship. They are not allowed to rear goat, sheep, fowls as these are sacrificial animals for Hindu deities.

The Mahima Dharma prescribes different procedure or observance of birth, death and marriage ceremonies. Instead of asking Brahmins to officiate in these functions, Mahima sanyasis should be invited.

The Gruhis must be hospitable to Mahima sanyasis who are friends, philosophers and guide to them.

Common rules for sanyasis and Gruhis

(a) The followers of Satya Mahima Dharma should not sleep unconsciously so that they can wake up at dawn. While taking a purificatory bath, they salute seven times to Brahma under the canopy of sky. Likewise before sunset they salute five times.
(b) The followers do not take food after sunset. xx
(c) They follow the motto "Ahimsa Parama Dharma" i.e., non-violence is true religion.
(d) Except Brahma, no other Hindu deity should be worshipped. Brahma is one and only one. Image worship is discouraged. Animal sacrifice to propitiate deity is forbidden. The followers should not attend rituals of traditional deities.
(e) Non-violence, simplicity, forgiveness, patience, truthfulness are the cardinal virtues which should be acquired by them.
(f) Intoxicants, specially drinking are strictly prohibited. x
(g) The followers should neither participate nor attend dance, drama, music or any type of recreational activities. These divert their mind from God. They should spend leisure by Bhajana, Kirtana and Smarana.
(h) Any type of medicine is prohibited. xx They believe that belief in Brahma can cure disease. Therefore He should be propitiated to ward off diseases, death and other misfortunes in life.

Gradations of Mahima Dharma sanyasis

There are no gradations of Sanyasihood among the "Kaupindhari Mahima Samaja".

But Balkala Dhari Mahima Samaja have three successive stages known as Bairagi, Apara Sanyasis and Para Sanyasis.

Area of conversions

During the life of Mahima Gosain propagation of Mahima Dharma was confined to certain places of Orissa.

After his death it spreaded to other parts of Orissa as well as outside the state. Some centres have been established in Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Nepal, Burma. x

A large number of sanyasis are moving in different places. Occasionally they return back to Joranda at the time of their annual festival. A few of them regularly come to Joranda for the management of the institution.

Though the main centre is situated at Joranda, the people of nearby villages have not embraced the sect. xx

Satya Mahima Dharma reveals that Mahima Gosain preferred to popularise his faith in rural areas. They succeeded in attracting the illiterate people of the rural areas. x

People

The followers of Satya Mahima Dharma belong to various castes and tribal sections.

When the religion was propagated a large number of scheduled caste people were attracted by this sect. The higher caste people like Brahmins were not enthusiastic at first for various reasons -

They occupy the topmost position in the caste herarchy. Mahimaism does not believe in caste system.

Idol worship by the Brahmins is denounced by the Mahima Dharma. About this it is noted in the Bengal district Gazetteer that except Brahmins all other caste people in large number had embraced this sect. xx

Regarding tribal conversion, we are informed by the sanyasis that primitive tribes have not accepted this sect due to difficulties of observing the rules. x A few Hinduised tribals like Gond, Desia Kandha, Bathudis have accepted the cult. xxx

Socio religious life of sa-aras, Desia Kandhas and Panas is given here showing their traditional culture which can throw light on the reasons of their conversion.

Kandha - Kandhas one of the important tribes of Orissa is divided into three sections- Kutia, Desia and Dongaria Kandhas. They have the highest numerical strength in Orissa.

Kutia and Dongaria Kandhas form sections of Primitive tribes who live in the forest and hills far away from human civilization.

But Desia Kandhas live in plain area amidst non-tribals. They are generally found in large number in Balangir, Sambalpur, Kalahandi and Puri (undivided) districts. They speak Oriya and have borrowed many cultural traits from Hindu neighbours.

Sa-ara- The Sa-aras, an assimilated tribe in Orissa have concentrated in the districts of Cuttack, Puri and Dhenkanal. They also speak Oriya and live among non-tribals.

These tribal sections have become more or less Hinduized accepting Hindu religious faiths.

Desia Kandhas have their own titulary deities. Hindu deities have been accepted by them. They observe Durgapuja, Makara Jatra, Puajiuntia etc.

Likewise sa-aras worship their village deity and visit Hindu shrines.

Pana - Pañas are found throughout Orissa. They were considered as untouchables, occupying a lower position in the caste hierarchy. Though they belong to Hindu community yet they have no access to Hindu shrines and temples.

They have their own titulary deities who reside at the out skirt of the village under a lonely tree or in a mud built hut. The priests are generally had from their own caste. Before independence their social and economic status did not enable them to mix with higher castes and worship at Hindu shrines. When Mahima Dharma was Propagated, Pana accepted it readily in order to raise their status and to worship Brahma, the supreme deity of Hindus.

Likewise the Kandhas and sa-aras are affected by Hindu idea of caste system. They do not accept water or cooked food from lower caste Hindus, but they are considered inferior by upper caste Hindu and are not allowed to worship Hindu deities.

Mahima Dharma was, therefore, fairly attractive to them.

Desia Kandhas possess strong belief on Dharma and Dharitri or Dharani (Sun and mother earth). Worship of Brahma before sun rise and sun set facing towards sun and taking dust from earth are interpreted by some converted Kandhas as obeying their own deities Dharma and Dharani.

Besides, Bhima Bhoi is responsible for conversion of Kandhas to Mahima sect.

Sa-aras lived around main centre of Mahima Dharma. They are also influenced by Hindu religious thoughts and belief. Thus it is accepted by a few Sa-aras.

x x

Effects on Social life

Satya Mahima Dharma aims at breaking down caste system by proclaiming equality of man-kind before god. The object of this gospel is to bring about a harmony to society by preaching one religion and one god for all. This is one of the important objectives of Mahima Dharma.

But still now it fails to mobilise the caste system. Even the followers still observe the caste rules. It is difficult on the part of followers to defy the caste rules as they live on a society where the percentage of converts is insignificant. x Moreover they themselves possess caste prejudices. x Converts belonging to higher castes do not take water from the converts of lower castes. Even the sanyasis are not free from these prejudices. xx

"Brahma Bibaha" (marriage according to Alekhism) has not yet been accepted by people. In Brahma Bibaha an Alekha Sanyasi officiates. Bride and Bride-groom exchange garlands each other and their palms are united by a sanyasi. xx The traditional marriage procedure is still followed. x

Performance of death rites by the converts is observed with a slight deviation from the traditional pattern. In case of death of a convert the dead body is buried instead of being cremated. On the 12th day after death, Sanyasis are invited to purify the house and a new pot containing food is offered to Mahima Gosain for eternal peace of the soul. A Balyalila is held. xx

If the convert is the head of the family and he has got no male members to perform rites, the help of any convert relative is taken. xx

In birth ceremony traditional method is followed in addition to Balyalila and Homo.

x x x

Advantages

The Satya Mahima Dharma has attempted to bring out social reformations. These are more desirable than the religious aspect.

Prohibition of animal sacrifice to appease deities for material benefit and that of practising magico religious methods for curing diseases are helpful to society. x

Death and marriage ceremonies, the important institutions of life incur high expenditure and require elaborate paraphernalia. Mahima Dharma has devised a simple and less costly method. xx

Another important aspect of Satya Mahima Dharma is to demolish caste system. As a section of Hindu, the untouchables get equal opportunity to worship Hindu high God. Though untouchability is now abolished by law still they have not moral courage to enter into Hindu temples or worship Hindu Gods. By adopting Mahima Dharma, they are capable of worshipping Brahma. By giving up habits of drinking and taking polluting food they elevate their social position. Worship of one God by all irrespective of class, caste and creed certainly fosters unity in the society which is divided into a number of groups based on castes and occupation.

x x

Some obstacles on progress of the religion

Acceptance of Satya Mahima Dharma is primarily based on personal choice of an individual who himself is coverted to the

sect without affecting other family members. There is no compulsion that children and grand children of the followers must accept this sect. Thus after the death of the convert, belief in Mahimaism does not continue in the family.

Idol worship and belief in polytheism are too difficult to be wiped out from the Hindu society. Many religious sects like Jainism, Budhism originated in Indian soil. But they could not stand before Hindu religion. The foundation of Hindu religion is based on idol worship and polytheism. Hence, it can not be removed easily.

The Mahima sect can not be expanded among intellectual and educated mass. Wearing of red ochred cloth, restrictions in sexual life, prohibition on using medicine etc. can not be practised by advanced people in the 20th century.

The Indian constitution provides freedom of religion to all irrespective of class, caste and society. Untouchability is abolished, Spread of education, attempt for upliftment of economic condition etc. can solve their problems. They are now allowed to enter into Hindu temples. But they themselves do not posses moral courage to enter. When they acquire it, they shall prefer to remain in Hindu religion. Mahima Dharma may not be able to attract them.

The tribals are ignorant, illiterate and unsophisticated. At this stage they can be moulded to accept any religion if they are provided with certain facilities. Christian missions working in tribal areas give relief, employment and other economic help at the time of need. Tribals have not reached that stage of realising the value of their own culture. Thus large scale conversion to Christianity is taking place in tribal area. But Mahima religion does not provide such type of help. It gives stress on bringing out a drastic change in religious belief only. But idealism can not be accepted by illiterate people unless some material benefits are added to it. Christian missionaries are conscious of this fact. They take initiative for the well being of the community by doing social welfare work. They live with the people, learn their language and try to solve their problems with true sympathy and understanding. xx They have provided schools, hospitals in the tribal area. Therefore it is difficult on the part of Mahima religion, a small organisation without any financial resources to stand in competition before Christian missions in tribal area. XX

The approach of Mahima religion is not systematic and attractive. They do not take keen interest to spread the sect in large scale. The sanyasis occasionally visit the areas but do not stay for longer period. xx

THE SOURCE OF MAHIMA DHARMA

Tracing the source of "Mahima Dharma" Dr. Kunja Behari Tripathy has stated as following in his article "The source of Mahima Dharma".

"The religion which he (Mahima Gosain) preached through his disciples is pure monotheism identical with the doctrine of the Vedanta or Upanishad.

In ancient times there were sects of pure monotheism in India. During the first half of the 7th century A.D., the Poet Banabhatta gives a description of the Ashrama of a saint called Dibakara Mitra in the forest region of mid-India, in his work entitled "Harsha Charita". In the hermitage of Dibakara Mitra there were scholars belonging to the various philosophical sects and one such sect was the "Upanishadic" sect. The followers of this sect followed the doctrine of the Upanishad in their lives.

The doctrines of the Upanishads do not accept the traditional caste system which divides people into different graded castes. During the Vedic period the sages of the Vedic hymns realised that they (i.e. the Vedic deities) represent different aspects of one supreme deity and this supreme deity was represented by the term "Brahman". So during the vedic period the Indian society was not divided into rigid castes as during the later periods.

Hence Mahima Gosain who realised the supreme deity by his meditation preached only the doctrine of worshipping the supreme God without taking recourse to any symbolical worship of the deity."

One of the Characteristics of Mahima Dharma which sharply distinguishes it from all other forms of Hinduism, though not from Upanishadic dharma, is its revolt against idol-worship.

X X X

Orissa during 19th century, in the context of the Indian renaissance and the social and political changes in the offing all over the world, was indeed a virgin soil for the rise of Mahima Dharma.

The movement of Mahima cult was not an isolated movement. Sadhu sundar Das had established an Ashram at Kujibar near Chaudwar and denounced idolatry and caste system. He died in the year 1838.

Arakhita Das was a prince-saint who through his Brahma-based non-conformist religion expounded reforms in Hindu religion as did Raja Ram Mohan Ray and Keshab Chandra Sen later. He was the heir apparent of the Raja of Bada Khemidi in Ganjam District. His great work "Mahimandala Gita" explains the illogicality of Hindu caste prejudicies and idol worship.

Chaitanya Das of Kalahandi is cited as the originator of Mahima cult. He had discarded idolatry and caste system and explained its illogicality in his books entitled "Nirguna Mahatmya" and "Vishnu Garva Purana".

Latter on Sadhu Chandra Mani Das of Baghapali village (Ex-Sonepur state) discarded Hindu caste system and idol worship in his great work "Sudhasara Gita".

Hinduism had lost its importance because of the growth of superstition and meaningless rituals in the nineteenth century. The sacrifice of animals during worship had created a feeling of revolt in the minds of the people. There was also intellectual confusion regarding the theory of "karma" and "Tapa marga". The Brahmins had also established their supremacy in the social sphere. Above all, the caste system had raised its head in the social sphere.

And above all, the age old Upanishadic cult which was deep rooted in the minds of thinkers got an outlet through Mahima cult, Mahima Gosain, the founder of Mahima cult established the age old philosophy in 19th century once again.

Mahima cult protested the evils in the social sphere. The revolt was against the prevailing social order and against prevailing religious ideas. This cult rejected the authority of vedas and the supremacy of the Brahmins. The Mahima cult tried to teach the people a simple set of doctrines to liberate the souls form the bondage of sufferings.



THE PHILOSOPHY OF MAHIMA DHARMA

The philosophy of Mahima Dharma is called "Visuddha advaita-vada" or pure non-dualism.

(i) According to Mahima Dharma, the world is not created by Maya which is a second principle in addition to the Brahma of advaita Vedanta. Its philosophy is pure non-dualism, because according to it, the world is created not by another principle in addition to the ultimate reality, but through the grace of one ultimate being who is beyond all categorisation.

The Mahima religion believes that the world is a real creation of God through His Mahima or Grace. The world, a temporary creation can be with drawn at any time by him.

Sri S.R.Mukharji while analysing the three terms i.e., "Satya", "Mahima" and "Dharma" has stated as following.

Sat

Sat' is that which is not limited by time, space and things which are unreal.

The Naiyayikas, however, admit only limitations of time and space as the characteristics of unreality. According to them Akasa, Kala, Dika and Atma, being eternal, are not limited by time and, being all pervading, are not limited by space either. They are, therefore, enumerated as realities.

Mahima Dharma, which is philosophically categorised as "Visuddhadvaita-Brahmavada", disagree with the Naiyayikas and declares that Param Brahma is the only ultimate reality and is of the nature of Sachidananda.

According to Mahima Dharma, the reality must be the absolute and free from all limitations, not only of time and space but also of other things.

Thus Param Brahma, the non-dual, Absolute reality is satya.

Here we find a close similarity between Mahima Dharma and Samkara Vedanta.

Mahima

In Mahima Dharma, Param Brahman- the absolute reality - is

(i) Dr. G. Mishra in his forward to "Mahima Dharma Darshana" (D.A.V. college, Koraput (1972)

said to be 'Alekha'. Because He is indescribable, being beyond all categories of thought.

Inspite of its close affinity with advaitavada of Samkara regarding the nature of the ultimate reality "Visuddha-advaita-Brahma Vada" of Mahima Dharma should not be confused with it.

Further it is expressed by Sri S.R. Mukharjee that Viswanath Baba draws a clear distinction between the two. Though like Advaita-vada, Visuddha- advaita- Brahmavada rejects dualism in all its forms, be it of the variety of Samkhya or Vedanta, yet, unlike Advaitavada, "bhakti" has the first place in it and is recognised as the only means of salvation. Here "bhakti" is not understood as a relation between two distinct beings, but as the attraction of the pure mind to the ultimate reality, which attraction, by being deepened, gradually destroys the mind and leads to oneness with the non -dual param Braham.

Dharma

The term "Dharma" indicates that which holds or supports. It is conceived of as the underlaying substratum of society and the world.

In Vedanta-sutra 1-3-16 Vyasadeva says that Brahma is the support of the world.

"Sankaracharya commenting on the sutra confirms its contention by citing the authority of Brhadaranyaka upanisad 3/8/9 where it is said, "Verily at the command of that Imperishable, O gargi, the Sun and the moon stand in their respective position. At the command of that imperishable, O Gargi, heaven and earth stand in their respective positions. At the command of that imperishable, O Gargi, what are called moments, hours, days and nights, half-months (Pakshyas), months, seasons, years stand in their respective positions. At the command of that imperishable, O Gargi, some rivers flow to the east from the white (snowy) mountains, others to the west in whatever direction each flows." (x)

At last it has been concluded that, the three terms, Satya, Mahima and Dharma separately and their conjunction Satya-Mahima-Dharma together indicate the same non-dual, indescribable, non-qualified, absolute Brahman, the aim of the adherents being to attain oneness with Him.



(x) Radhakrishna's Principal Upanisshads, PP-232-33

ADVAITAVADA (SANKAR) AND VISUDDHADVAITA-BRAHMAVADA OF MAHIMA DHARMA

Though like advaita-vada, Visuddha advaita Brahmavada rejects dualism in all its forms, be it of the variety of Samkhya or Vedanta, yet unlike Advaitavada, "bhakti" has the first place in it and is recognised as the only means of "salvation."

Here bhakti is not understood as a relation between two distinct beings, but as the attraction of the pure mind to the ultimate reality, which attraction, by being deepened, gradually destroys the mind and leads to oneness with the non-dual Param-Brahma.

2. Another point of distinction between Advitavada of Samkara and Visuddha- advaitavada of Mahima Dharma is that the latter, unlike the former, does not take creation to be illusory or due to maya.

Maya has no place in Mahima Dharma. In the place of maya, it uses the word "Mahima".

'Mahima' literally means the highest principle, higher than which is not possible. It is Param-Brahma Himself in his wonderful power of creation.

Param-Brahma and Mahima are one and the same, the latter being only means of describing what can not be described.

3. The followers of Mahima cult offer their prayers with their face turn to the east and west in morning and evening respectively in order to ensure that the prayers are offered to Brahma before the sun-rise and sun-set (brahma-muhurta). This is called Sarana Darshna.

We don't find this type of Sarana : Darshana in Sankara's Advitavada.

4. Mahima religion is different both from Hinduism (Advaita vada) and Buddhism in as much as it believes in mass confession, mass prayer and community dinner in a year in a grand annual congregation.



THE PHILOSOPHY OF MAHIMA DHARMA : SRIMATI BANI BASU

Srimati Bani Basu in her article "The philosophy of Mahima Dharma" has written as follows.

"The philosophical truth on which Satya Mahima Dharma is founded is that "The ultimate reality is one and the only one".

The human mind through ages has worshipped the one as manifested in many. But the true worship is, in the words of Bhima Bhoi, the great poet expounder of Mahima Dharma, "to come down to the stem leaving the branches"- in otherwords to withdraw from the many to the one and the only one.

This theory of oneness of the supreme Reality of the one and only one God is known in Indian philosophy as Advaitabada.

Advaitabada has been the doctrine of many great philosophers in our land like Sankar (early 9th century), Ramanuja (11th century) and others, Mahima Dharma has takenup according to its learned expounder Abadhuta Biswanth Baba, the very same age old truth, but in a refined form.

Shankara's Advaitabada known as Nirbishes or the general theory of Advaitabad says that Brahma or the ultimate reality is one and the only one. He is the one truth, the one reality and every thing else is "Maya" or illusion. The world we are in, has no reality at all. "Brahma Satya, Jagatmithya". Brahma only is true, the universe is false. Brahma is Vidya and world is Avidya.

Ramanuja believes with Shankara that God is one and the only one, but he does not believe in the falsity of the world. Brahma is surely the one Alekha Param Brahma Niranjana and he is the truth, but the world he has created is also a truth and not a mere Maya or illusion. Brahma is true so how can his creation be untrue ? The whole world of creation "lives and moves and hath its being in Him the one and the true God. The world is a part of Brahma and it has a real existence not a part from but only in Brahma". This is Ramanuja's Visistha Advaitabada or the special theory of Advaitabada.

Mahima Dharma's Advaitabada

Mahima Dharma's "Advaitabada" says Biswanath Baba is "Visuddha" or pure Advaitabada.

It is based on both Shankara and Ramanuja's theory but it has woven round it a new and beautiful pattern.

It says Brahma is advaita. He is one and only one and their is no duality or dvaita any where, but the world he has created is certainly not Maya neither does it have its existence in Him only.

The world has a separate existence but only as Brahma's Mahima or glory. But Brahma is by no means limited by his created world.

He is Satyam, Gnanam, Anantam, Ananda Maya.

He is beyond time and space, beyond life and death, beyond all senses, all symbols and all attributes.

He is Alekha, Nirguna, Niranjan.

Yet all the attributes are in Him for He is as Upanishad says-

"Shrotasya shrotram Manasaha Masaha
Pranashya Pranam Chakkhu sas Chakkhu."

It is He who is the listening power of all that hears, the thinking power of all that thinks, the seeing power of all that sees and the living breath of all that lives.

He is Alekha, for He can not be known by any signs. He is Avyakta for He can not be described by any words.

He is all powerful, all knowing God who hath created the world. So the world of creation is His Mahima.

The single word Mahima helps the mind to conceive Brahma in all His infinite attributes and glories and to think of the world not as Maya neither as a part of Brahma, but as his Mahima or glory.

Mahima is the immediate way of perceiving the one not through reason however, but through devotion and surrender.

He is the Anama or the nameless, the shunya Brahama who has created this world, the world which is the manifestation of His infinite power and glory.

But this Shunya is not void, it is Purna or all in all, it is not Nihil or nothing, it is everything. As Bhima Bhoi says, He is the "Divine More" through whose Ajna or behest the moon and the sun, light or the earth and water move.

Even a twig does not move without the Ajna, it also can redeem one of all sin."

The Divine determination or Ajna is the creator, Preserver and Ruler of all the regions of Universes of all the world of creation.

We worship the One Divine person as the Alekha Niranjana Param Brahma and we perceive the creation as His infinite glory or Mahima.

(Reproduced from the book "Satya Mahima Dharma" by Shri Nilamani Senapati)

THE CHARACTERISTIC OF MAHIMA CULT

Orissa is the bedrock of many religions and philosophical currents and cross currents. Orissa was the seat of Jainism and Buddhism in the past. Buddhism flourished in Orissa with its different branches such as Bajrayana, Kalachakrayana and Sahajayana. Presence of these religious cults presuppose the existence of Brahminical religion of the Vedas in Orissa. The two contemporary philosophies like Jainism and Buddhism emerged as reactions against Brahminism which was pre-eminently the monopoly of the Brahmins. Their reactions were against the authority of the Vedas, the worship of idols and the religious rites and caste distinction.

But the role of religions and philosophical thoughts has taken a different turn in the history of Orissa. The Jagannath cult in Orissa is a synthesis of many cultures.

Buddhism believe that the sacred relic of Lord Buddha is preserved in Lord Jagannath.

The Vedantins believe that the Lord Himself is the Brahman incarnate as He is shapeless and indescribable.

The Jainas take it for granted that He is their reality.

The Vaishnabs take Him as Lord Bishnu.

But one of the characteristics of Mahima Dharma which distinguishes it from all other forms of religions, though not from Upanisadic dharma, is its revolt against the Jagannath -deity. While the people belonging to above religions of Orissa use to go to Puri to worship the image of Jagannath, some of Mahimaites are the only exception to this. It is a historical fact that once some Mahimaitees went so far as to go to Puri to seize and destroy the image of Jagannath and had an unsuccessful fight with the priests of the temple.

Mahima Gosain made clear to his earlier disciple Vaishnava Jagannath Das of Balasingha (Baudh) that he was the sensuous incarnation of Lord Jagannath of Puri. Because of his sensuous form, he can not achieve salvation. So he was converted to Mahima Cult by Mahima Gosain and was renamed as Govinda Baba. This has been noted by Bhima Bhoi in his first script on Mahima Dharma, i.e., "Nirveda Sadhan".

Strangely enough, Bhima Bhoi says that Mahima Gosain is the incarnation of Lord Buddha repeatedly in Chautisa Madhuchakra (Page-6) and in Bhajanas.

Mahima Dharma does not recognise caste distinctions like Hinduism. Mahimaites believe that caste does not depend on skin, blood, flesh or bone. Only by one's actions is his caste determined. The Niralamba Upanisad says-

"Brahmavid sa eva brahmanah"

Biswanath Baba claims that the Philosophy of this religion is pure-nondualism (Visudhha advaita-vada) in as much as the world is not created by 'Maya' which is a second principle in addition to Brahma of Advaita-Vedanta. Its Philosophy is pure non-dualism because according to it the world is created not by another principle in addition to the ultimate reality, but by the grace (mahima) of one ultimate being who is beyond all categorisation.

Advaita-vada of Shankara advocates exclusively "jnana" as the only means of salvation. But Mahima Dharma is fundamentally a bhakti cult. Bhakti in Mahima dharma means the attraction of the pure mind towards the ultimate truth i.e., the Param Brahma.

"Mahima Dharma is not a modern variant of Buddhism. The followers of this religion do not regard the ultimate reality as mere void. They consider it as shapeless, formless, eternal being who can not be described in worlds. Unlike Buddhism, this religion believes that the world is a real creation of God through his Mahima or Grace, though a temporary creation which can be withdrawn at any time". (x)



(x) Prof. G. Mishra in his forward to Mahima Dharma Darshna (D.A.V. College, Koraput (1972)

SUNYABAD IN MAHIMA DHARMA

A considerable knowledge of Mahima Cult is handed down to us by Bhima Bhoi, the eminent disciple of Mahima Gosain and latter by Viswanath Baba, a follower and master of Mahima Cult.

Mahima cult originated in Orissa in the middle of 19th century. At that time neither Buddhism nor the Vedanta was working in their undiluted form in Orissa. Orissa of 19th century presented a sort of Brahminism heavily loaded with Vaisnavism. With the appearance of Sri Chaitanya, Vaisnavism assimilated character of all Indian thoughts including Buddhism.

Referring to the main teachings and beliefs of Mahima Dharma Miss Eschman writes- "Mahima Dharma takes up the Buddhist concept of emptiness (Sunya) and identifies it with the Hindu conceptions of Parama Brahma and Isvara Purusa.

Sunya Parama Brahma is characterised more precisely with the concepts Alekhs (indescribable), Nirguna (without attributes), Nirakara (formless), Anadi (eternal), Niranjana(pure or without support) and Mahima (Glory or radiance), all of which already appear in the medieval Oriya literature for describing Sunya Brahma or as synonyms for Him." The concept of Sunya was in use in different schools of Hindu philosophical and religious traditions and Buddhism.

In so far as reality is regarded as Sunya, many would identify 'Mahima' with sunyavada Buddhism says Prof. Arta Ballav Mohanty in his preface to Bhima Bhoi's Chautisa Madhuchakra.

Sunyavada Buddhism is often criticised by the Jainas and Hindus as nihilism. It is often interpreted as the doctrine of nothingness, while according to Mahimaites 'Sunya' is not mere nothing. Every thing is there in it- even this transitory world comes out of it. In the words of poet Bhima Bhoi-

Akhandita Brahma se je gota hoi achhi
Kichhi una nahi tara purna rahi achhi.

(Brahma Nirupana Gita, Page- 23)

The Buddhist concept of "Sunya" had its link with similar doctrine found in Vedanta. In Mahayana school of Buddhism it was converted from a negative concept to a positive idea to imply the ultimate reality which underlines all manifestations in nature and the physical world.

The concept of Sunya ultimately trickled into the medieval Vaisnavism in Orissa.

Ultimately, Sunya also came to be treated as the attribute of a personal God who can be attained through true devotion. This personal God was supposed to have the twin attributes of "being nowhere'" and "being every where".

The psychic conditions and emotional states which are associated with its craving to attain to the personal God have been explored at great length in the medieval literary school known as Panchasakha. Some attributes of this personal God which are frequently mentioned are Sunya, Alekha, Anadi, Nirakara is equated with Param Brahma or Sunya Brahma.

Moksa

Moksa or salvation consists in union of the soul through devotion or Bhakti with this higher reality or Sunya, Alekha, Anadi Nirakara etc.

Moksa is achieved not through any external rites, prescribed code of conduct etc., but through meditative path.

"The late Laxmi Narayan Sahu had argued that the concept of void in Mahima was different from its counterpart in Buddhism. According to him "the Buddhist conception of 'Sunya' is that in the ultimate their is nothing. But the Alekhist conception of 'Sunya' is that there is only one after all the appearances disappear. That again has no appearance." (x)

Sri Sitakanta Mohapatra writes, this is a very interesting and valid point and the concept of 'Sunya' in Bhima's writing would seem to agree with this view.

Sunya is not a total negation, a complete nescience or nonbeing. It is only a negation of appearances, of becomings. For it is the pure state of Being. The various stages of its becoming are only various forms or manifestations or becoming.



(x) Sitakanta Mohapatra - Bhima Bhoi - Page - 23

SUNYAVADA IN ORIYA LITERATURE AND BHIMA BHOI

"Sunyavada" or the concept of void had a long literary and philosophical history in Oriya literature.

In this connection, the views of Sri Sitakanta Mohapatra is quoted from his book Bhima Bhoi (Page 23 to 27)

"Sunyavada was essentially a part of the mystic view of life which had held sway in Oriya literature right from Baudhagan o' Doha times. Siddhacharya Kanhupa, for example, expressed an intense and personal realisation of the individual psyche with the divine through a language that is symbolic, sometimes to the point of being obscure.

Bhima Bhoi's writings are a very important part of the Mahima or Alekh cult.

Alekha cult is also popularly known as the cult of the Kumbhipatias. The Alekha cult believes in the idea of a void and in fact sings a lot about it but as a concept it is somewhat different from the concept formed in Buddhism.

Buddhism laid supreme emphasis on "Karma Yoga", on the capacity of human action to work out one's deliverance from the cycle of life and importance was attached to the concept of Grace of an Almighty which occupies a very important place in both Hinduism and Christianity. It was an effect, a form of "Karma Yoga", akin to Malraux's idea of "escape through action" which in Buddhism meant "Nirvana".

It was thus based upon a system or belief that the world was full of miseries and the objective of life was to gain deliverance from the life-cycle.

Buddha was silent about Brahman or a reality beyond the senses.

In the Alekh cult there is a similar emphasis on Sunya or void.

Mahajana Buddhism was a branch of latter Buddhism and had gradually declined into "Sahajayana" or as it was known in popular parlance "Sahajia".

On Mahajana faith Saivism and Vaisnavism also gradually had their influence. Nagarjuna had made efforts to bring together

the Brahman and the activities of the Sramanas under one fold. He had also accepted "yoga" and "bhakti" in his philosophy and teaching. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the tree primary deities of the Hindu pantheon and also Tara were accepted.

Gradually in Buddhism "Sakti" worship or mother worship also found a place.

Later the philosophy of "Kalachakra" and the idea that 'Samsara' was created by the coming together of Sakti and Adibuddha (The primordial Buddha) also entered Mahayana Buddism. Buddhists under the influence of this Kalachakra philosophy came to believe that the "Sunya Purusha" who has called as Niranjana (literally niranjan means the blemishless, the flawless) was the creator of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar through his primordial energy of "Adi Sakti". In a way, therefore, Shahajayana philosophy became later indistinguishable from Vaishnavism. One could see this, for example, in the writings of the Bengali poet Chandi Das.

In Alekha cult we come across the ideas of "Sunya Purusha", the wheel of time or Kalachakra as also the idea of void and escape through right action.

As in latter Buddism so also in Alekha cult Sunya (void), Niranjana (the blemishless), Alekha (the unwritten), The Brahman (the primary being) and Adimata (the primordial mother) are some of the appellations used to describe the ultimate reality.

In his Stuti Chintamani, Bhima Bhoi has made specific reference to Kalachakra.

Bhima also designates the Brahman as Sahaja Ananda or "the easily -realised Bliss."

The history of Oriya literature has a long tradition of referring to reality as the great void, as the unwritten word, the blemishless and the unmanifest.

Some other epithets used to describe reality are Anakar (the shapeless), the Sunya purusha (the empty beings), Abyakta (the unmanifest), Mahasunya (the great void), Alekha (the unwritten), Nirakara (the shapeless) and Anadi (the one without the beginning).

Right from Sarala Das's Mahabharata through a long chain of literary works including Balaram Das's Brahmanda Bhugola, Virata Gita, Jagannath Das's Tula Bhina, the writings of Achyutananda, Dinakrushna and Arakhita Das and many other lessors the Supreme reality is delineated as one without form, without end or beginning, without shape, without qualities etc.

In the Sarala Mahabharat there is a reference to the supreme Godhead in the following lines :

"Jayatu Anadi, Abhaya Nirakara
Anahata Purusatu, Anakara Jyoti."

(Victory to you, O' Lord one without beginning, without shape and the fearless. Thou art the unmanifest Purusha, the light without shape.)

In Balaram Das's Virata Gita, we find the following lines :

"Mahasunyaru sunya hela
se sunyu pranaba janmila
Pranaba aka khyara sambhuta
Jiba parama duinaba."

(From the great void, the void was created. From the void was born the Omkar. From this Omkar, the letters were created as also jiva and parama.)

Achyutananda of the panchasakha group also spoke of ekakhyara Brahman, the Brahman that is unique and does not ever face dissolution. He also describes it as Alekha Swarupa i.e., as the unwritten one.

The 16th century poetic works of the Panchasakha was perhaps the most creative from the point of view of mystical writings. Of the five who were termed as Panchasakha, Jagannath Das and Balaram Das were the most important and in their hands mysticism acquired an intensity and range which made it one of the most creative periods of Oriya poetry.

It was sunyabad that held the field at the time.

The concept of ultimate reality, described as Sunya Purusa or the shapeless being, might have been influenced by the Buddhist idea of void. But this Sunya Purusha was the embodiment of both consciousness and energy.

In Achyutananda, one of the less important Panchasakha, for example, the Sunya Purusha is described as :

"He remains ever detached and yet he is the creator of all illusions. He is eternally kind and inheres in all the evanescent clay-bodies. He knows all the conceit and mischiefs. He kills us in the void and yet takes us in the path of divinity. All alone he lives in the void and performs his leela."

Medieval Vaishnav literature thus created the concept of void not in the Buddhist sense of emptiness or absence. It was rather a presence, a concrete identity; the Alekha Purusha who was also powerful.

In "Vishnugarva Purana", for example, the Vaishnaba Kavi Chaitanya Das describes almost in identical manner as Achyutananda the concept of this Alekha-Purusha.

"His shape is one of total emptiness and yet he fills up the immense empty space with his being and that way He is omnipresent. Emptiness is His house and He moves in all the spheres through this emptiness."

The five Oriya poets generally described as Panchasakhas tried to put forth their ideas on the individual soul its search for deliverance and the relationship between the individual soul and the universal soul through a number of generally accepted images or metaphors.

The theory of Pinda Brahmanda was one such extended metaphor.

The mystic element in the poetry of the Panchasakhas was based upon an intimate and sophisticated portrayal of the relationship between purusha and prakruti, the individual soul and the over-soul compared to Radha and Krishna and Sunya was the eternal field of their Rasa. Sunya is thus not an absence; it is a ubiquitous presence sometimes identified with Vrindavana, sometimes with Golaka. In other words, Sunya is the stage on which the divine performs his leela, the drama of perpetual renewal and ever-recurring dissolution and rejuvenation, the unending sequence of life and death, in the ever-subsisting intimate relationship between the soul and the over-soul.

In Panchasakha literature the psychic conditions and the emotional states which are associated with the craving to attain to the personal god have been explored at great length and in considerable depth.

Moksha is the union of the sole through devotion or bhakti with the over-soul. It is achieved not through any external rites or pilgrimages but through an intense meditative path, through a deep cleansing of the doors of perception.

The tradition in the poetry of Boudhagan o' Doha, Panchasakha and medieval Vaishnavism found an even more poignant expression in the writings of Bhima Bhoi. In his "Stuti" chintamani and his bhajans he gave a powerful expression to not only the mystic ideas of personal salvation but also to the redemption of man in society from his cruel destiny. His poetry had not merely the meditative philosophical quality of Panchasakha literature but it also brought to it the lyricism and musical quality which was associated with earlier poets like Gopal Krushna, Banamali or Kavisurya. In extremely lyrical lines Bhima Bhoi brought forth the essence of the well-known Mahima cult in his celebrated lines quoted below. The poet was prepared to consign his soul to the hell if it could save humanity.

"Boundless is the anguish and misery
Who can see it and tolerate the living
let my soul be condemned to hell.
But let the universe be redeemed."

Bhima Bhoi considered himself to be a child and almost like a child he wanted to unravel the mysteries of existence. He was perhaps the most significant expression of mysticism in Oriya poetry.

BHIMA BHOI & BISWANATH BABA IN MAHIMA DHARMA

Bhima Bhoi

Mahima Gosain, the founder of Mahima Dharma, wrote no books. He preached his teachings by oral instructions. A considerable knowledge of his teachings is handed down to us by the writing of Bhima Bhoi, one of his very eminent disciples.

The most original voice of Mahima Dharma is echoed in the writings of Bhima Bhoi, the great exponent of the religion.

In the words of Prof. S.Nath, "The obvious advantage that he (Bhima Bhoi) enjoyed was that he had the Darsan of the Guru (Mahima Gosain). xx His writings are, therefore, the only original source material available though he had the limitations of his writings being influenced by the fancy of a poet. xx The writings of the poet are second to none in being original, authentic and real. They are unsophisticated because they flow from his mouth and not from his pen in the manner he sees and experiences the Guru Mahima Goswami. Having been left with no second opportunity to give a second touch to which writings (it is even said that he dictated couplets of a Bhajan to two writers alternatively) one can have reliance of a high order on his writings as foundation materials for the religion. xx"

Biswanath Baba

After Bhima Bhoi, Biswanath Baba is decidedly the most eminent exponent of the religious philosophy of Mahima Dharma. He has done a serious and systematic work on it in his books.

Biswanath baba says that the Mahima Dharma is as old as the Sanatan Hindu Dharma. He has examined the various practices,

faiths and concepts of the religion in the light of the Upanisad, shruties etc., and proves that the religion has its origin in Upanisadic literature. Mahima Gosain, who is ever eternal and ever true assumed the human form in the early part of the nineteenth century only to re-emphasise the Adwaita Darshana.

Biswanath baba gives pre-eminent position to Guruvakya and quotes Sruti (Scripture), Upanisads etc., alongwith Bhima Bhoi's writings in support of Guruvakyas.

Bhima Bhoi and Biswanath Baba and Mahima cult of Orissa

Mahima Dharma movement was started in Orissa in the 19th century. It took its birth out of the two great religions i.e., Hinduism and Buddhism. In India both the religions have influenced each other and have grown out of their interaction.

In some places Buddhism under the influence of Hinduism gradually merged and became a sect of Hinduism. In Orissa, Lord Jagannath is regarded as a Buddhist God. Hindus treat Him as Buddha avatar in Kali Yuga.

Buddhism which was against idol worship became a sect entertaining idol worship and also tantra.

Mahima Dharma is not a separate religion like Jainism and Buddhism. It is intended to reform the existing religious practices and beliefs of the Hindus. But people mistook them to be either Buddhist or Christians due to its reformist attitude.

But the Mahimaites are Hindus is evident from their literatures.

The main sources from which we come to know about Mahima Dharma are Bhima Bhoi's bhajans and Biswanath baba's scholarly works.

Bhima Bhoi wrote genuine devotional lyrics, pulsating with reverence for the Alekha Param Brahma and at the same time expressing Mahima attitude towards life. In his lyrics the great poet tries to blend devotion and thought together in one whole. The songs are expressed in such noble and dignified language that it touches the heart of anybody who sings them.

The credit of constructing systematic works out of the scattered and brief works and remarks goes to Biswanath Baba. To justify the view that the teachings of Guru Mahima Gosain was correct, he has largely quoted the supporting 'slokas' from vedas, Upanisads, Advaita Vedanta etc.

This is clear indication that Mahima cult is not intended to part away from its parent religion, i.e. Hinduism but only an attempt at reforming the existing religion.

Apart from this, Mahimaites also like Hindus, believe in Karmaphala, rebirth, transmigration of soul etc. which are peculiar to Hinduism.

Mahimaite maintains that the world-creation alongwith its manifold character is actually made possible due to the divine or incomprehensible grace (Lila) of Brahman.

Biswanath baba asserts that the Satya Mahima Dharma, preached by Mahima Gosain is fundamentally based on a kind of Philosophy which he terms as "Alekha Param Brahma Darsanam" or "Visuddha advaitavada". According to him the Advaitavada of Sankara is not the pure form of advaitism. Sankara's Advaitism, he names, as "Nirvisesadvaita vada". Sankara, according to Biswanath Baba, has misrepresented Advaitism by introducing the mayavada. By accepting maya or avidya as the cause of the world creation, Sankara is forced to admit two principles, viz, Brahman and avidya. But this very acceptance of two principles, Biswanath baba thinks, is definitely inconsistent with the prior acceptance of non-dual Brahman as ultimately real. The fundamental tenet of Advaitism becomes misconceived by declaring both Atman as nirguna and world to be due to avidya. (x)

Bhakti (devotion) and liberation (Mukti)

Bhakti is a path to liberation has been emphatically discussed in Narada Bhakti Sutra and Sandilya satasutra.

According to Narada it is through absolute surrender to the Almighty and an intense pain felt when one forgets him that one can claim to have devotion towards Him.

The same prescription is given in Bhagavada Gita, where Arjuna is instructed to surrender everything at the sacred feet of the Almighty.

Bhima Bhoi and Biswanath baba are the champions of this path. But Biswanath baba slightly differs from Bhima Bhoi, in advocating jnanabhakti yoga, which according to him is the best amongst all paths.

The title of Para and Apara sanyasi

The Balkaladhari Mahima sannyasis are of two different categories arranged in a hierarchical order.

(x) Prak-kathana by Prof. Ratnakara Pati, page X to Biswanath Baba's "Alekh parambrahma Darsanam:

Those who renunciate the world and join the camp of the religious preachers are known as apara sannyasis as they are still under training by the para sannyasi, known as the highest type of sannyasis who have, abandoned the worldly desires and have developed an aspiration for God realisation and have realised the exact implication of such identity statements like "TATTVAMASI".

This order of Para and Apara sannyasi is the creation of Biswanath baba. The Kaupindhari Samaj of Joranda do not accept such distinction among Sannyasis. This is also not found in the literature of Bhima Bhoi, the first poet of Mahima cult.

Karmavada

Like the other systems of Indian thoughts Mahima Dharma advocates belief in the principle of Karmavada. The results of action and the cycle of birth and rebirth, according to Mahima Dharma, come to a close after one attains salvation by the realisation of Mahima, the ultimate reality through Bhakti.

Sankara's Advaita Vedanta high lights absolute knowledge as the gateway to mokhya (salvation). It is significant that "Bhakti marga" is mainly advocated by the upholders of Saguna Brahma and the Jnana marga for the upholders of Nirguna Brahman. One finds such a proof in the Vaishnaba Philosophy of Sri Chaitanya. But Mahima being a synthetic religion champions the cause of Bhakti inspite of its adherence to "Nirguna Brahman"- hypothesis, Moreover, the Jnana element is not completely absent."



BHIMA BHOI'S PHILOSOPHY

Mahima Gosain Himself blessed and asked the poet Bhima Bhoi, to give expression to the basic teachings of Mahima Dharma in his poetry.

Sri Sitakanta Mohapatra has mentioned in his book "Bhima Bhoi" (page 22) that, "It was in Bhima's poetic utterances that the dry philosophical ideas and concepts of Mahima cult found their way to the hearts of millions in Orissa and outside this state through an outburst of lyric energy.

The community prayers offered by the bhaktas of Mahima Dharma and even those who are not formally believers in the cult use the large repertoire of Bhima's songs, Jananas and bhajans.

"I do not know if through deep meditation and intellect one can see the vision of the Almighty Guru. But I do see Him and then forget what to tell Him when I see Him"- says Bhima Bhoi in his composition. In these lines Bhima not only establishes by implication the superiority of 'bhakti' (devotion) over gyana (intellect) but also seeks to establish a spiritual and emotional condition through which the devotee attains a vision of the supreme Reality or Alekh Niranjan.

The twin aspects of his quest for salvation and the attachment of a higher order of existence are inextricably linked to each other.

The philosophy expressed by Bhima Bhoi is thus "Bhakti jukta gyana marga" and not "gyana juktaBhaktimarga" as preached by Biswanath baba.

Even though Bhima was aware of the cleansing powers of Bhakti, he emphasised the role of self-less devoted action. He also emphasised the need for total surrender of every thing, happiness and miseries, guilt and sin at the feet of Lord, the Alekha.

Mahima cult, as expressed by Bhima Bhoi in Stuti Chintamani, is basically a humanist cult. It believes that even the worst sinner can attain deliverance through devotion to Alekh.

In Stuti Chintamani Bhima Bhoi has expressed his idea of cosmology as below -

"From Alekh Brahma, the void was born.
From void, space and sky were created.
From the sky came colours.
Later from the Anama came fire, ether and water.

Still later from the Anama, the Sun, the moon, the trinity (Brahma-Vishnu-Siva) and all the moving and static objects were created."

In "Nirveda Sadhana", Bhima Bhoi has explained through Mahima Gosain to Govinda baba, the first disciple of Mahima cult that the essence of Satya Mahima Dharma is the path of detachment (nibrutti) and not attachment (Prabrutti). It is important to live a simple life. The teaching of Vedas can not solve the question of salvation. One can achieve Alekha if their is 'nirveda sadhana' i.e., great devotion and austere action which does not depend on Vedas.

In "Brahma Nirupana Gita" Bhima Bhoi has defined the nature and qualities of Brahman in 4th canto. Bhima Bhoi says-

He is the disciple and He is the Guru.
He is darkness and He is light.
He inflicts punishments and He bears it.
He is the Prisoner and He is the Jailor.
xx He is formless and yet with form. etc.

He says that Vedas and Vedantas have not been able to define Brahman. One cannot know Brahman through shastras or learned discourses. The only way to attain Brahman is intense craving like the children for the mother.

In "Astaka Bihari Gita" he has asked the bhaktas to lead a pure, austere life to get over the evils of Kali Yuga.

In "Adi Anta Gita", Bhima Bhoi has explained the secrets of the body in metaphysical terms. "Jiba" has been taken as the female of the species and "Parama" (Supreme being) as the male.

The Chautisas of Bhima Bhoi expresses all the idealism, dreams and aspirations of his great mind and at the sametime faithfully analyses the philosophical and mystical thoughts of the Mahima Cult. In one Chautisa he prays Mahima Gosain to restore the true religion, to rescue the pious and the devotees and at the same time to show mercy to the sinners. .From 11th to the 19th chautisas he expresses his deep sympathy for the suffering human race and appeals to all to dedicate themselves unconditionally to Mahima Gosain, the great dweller of the void. Here Mahima Gosain is characterised as Kalki Purusha, Alekha, Niranjan and the enlightened Buddha. Here the poet expounds the philosophy of Jiva and Parama - the fervent attempt of Jiva to meet and be one with parama. He has also explained here the ideologies of ultakadamba tree, the sada chakra, trikuta, Vankunala, Golahata, Kaunri Patna, Amana Mandala as narrated by Panchasakhas.

The chautisas assert that Mahima Gosain was the embodiment of the great Sunya Brahma and that Joranda, where the samadhi Mandir of Mahima Gosain exists is the visible manifestation of the void region.

Mahima Gosain is described as the dweller of the ocean (Khirashindhu basi) and the dweller of the heaven and Vaikuntha (Swarga Baikuntha Basi) by Bhima Bhoi. These epithets are also applicable to "Vishnu" the highest of Vaishnavism.

Bhima Bhoi in Khaliapali (Sonepur ex-state) did not live the life of a sanyasi. His monastery was a seat of experiment for achieving the synthesis between life spiritual and life temporal. Annapurna, his spiritual consort was a sanyasini in strict sense of the term and was living a life of austerity and moral purity. She was a great spiritual force in the Ashram.

The monastic institute at Khaliapali was organised by Bhima Bhoi after his own idealism. He followed the system of Vaishnavism prevalent during his period. He removed the bar of distinction between the life spiritual and life temporal. He offered the same status to the females as in the case of males. He lived with Annapurna in the same Ashrma and made her sanyasini. That is why, Bhima Bhoi is not accepted as a true follower of Mahima cult by Joranda group.

The Balkaladharis of Joranda declare that Bhima Bhoi in his latter life (from 1877 AD to 1895 AD) when he founded his own matha at Khaliapali deviated from the principles preached by Mahima Gosain, allowing himself to be worshipped as an incarnation of the Lord. Therefore they disconnected all their relations from him and his seat.

Bhima Bhoi's Philosophy relating to Mahima Cult

As per writings of Bhima Bhoi, Mahima cult is a humanist cult. It believes that even the worst sinner can attain deliverance through devotion to the Lord.

Lie, adultery, envy, greed are to be completely given up.

Happiness and unhappiness are to be treated as equal.

A women is to be looked upon as a mother.

In Struti Chintamani, Bhima Bhoi has given a lower position to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva in the Alekha cosmology and in its religious pantheon. He has said that "Brahma" who is the ultimate god has manifested himself as Krushna and Jagannath.

Because of deviation from the correct path and ignorance of God's grace human beings are walled in guilt and sin. So he gives

a call to men to come to the path of rectitude which is laid down in the Mahima philosophy. Otherwise the whole world is going to be destroyed by yoginis.

The dark-age or Kali Yuga is characterised by loss of moral values and compassion. The dark-age would end and the Mahima cult will be the avenues to recreate society and human beings.

He believed in one world, one Dharma and one Mahima Samaj. He said all the creations are one and creator is also one, second to none. The human race is one, i.e., man is created by Mahima. Man can atlest be divided into two - the male and the female. There can therefore, be no further subdivisions based on caste, colour, creed, occupations etc., which are man-made.

He has established the superiority of bhakti (devotion) over gyana (intellect) and also seeks to establish a spiritual and emotional condition through which the devotee attains a vision of Alekha.

The twin aspects of his quest for salvation and attainment of a higher order of existence are inextricably linked to each other.

Against idol worship he says, "It is in sheer ignorance that people worship icons, offering cakes, sweets and puddings, and appealing to them for protection. They do not realise the simple fact that those are mere figures, without souls. How can they grant them their wishes ? People do not worship Him who created them but run to statues of wood and metal and say, "save us, save us",! How unthinking is this approach of living human beings to dead idols ! and how strange that He who created humanity out of nothing is so clean forgotten ?"

(Translation : M.Mansingh)

In Stuti Chintamani, Bhima Bhoi has given a new idea to his followers. He has drawn out a synthesis between the life spiritual and life temporal. He says that Mahima can be achieved in both ways. One should be very sincere in his or her effort in achieving salvation.

Bhima Bhoi has written -

"Namati Akshyaya Ajanma Ajaya
Chari Yuge Jebe Satya
Gruhe thai bihita karme chalile
sabu heba parapata."

(Stuti chintamani - 29 Boli)

Again *"Joga bhoga duhen samana atanti*
Kahara pakshyare jiba ?

(Stuti Chintamani 80 Boli)

If the name 'Mahima' is Akshyaya (eternal) Ajanma(unborn), and Ajaya (victorious) and the only truth in four yugas, then every thing can be achieved even if a house holder does his duty and walks on the correct path.

Joga (meditation) and Bhoga (what is pleasing and pleasurable) are one and the same. Decide your self as to which one is to be followed.

Sin is primarily supposed to be of two types- the inherited and the acquired. The former is the result of one's actions in previous life (birth). The individual soul has no means of running away from it. The latter is the result of one's action in this birth. One could keep away from the latter by devotionally ordained action based upon self-discipline. The former can only be removed with the grace of God. Even though bhakti has the cleansing power, Bhima Bhoi also emphasised the role of selfless devoted action.

The concept of "yuga" was integral to Bhima Bhoi's thinking. Starting from the Satya Yuga to Kali Yuga it was a gradual degeneration of values in society. From the impending communal disaster, Bhima seeks the grace of Alekha and calls upon the humanity to come to the path of righteousness. He calls on the rudras, the men in Brahma loka, the Gods, the nagas, the asuras, in fact the whole of the living world, to remember the supreme reality and as for His grace and compassion.

In **Brahma Nirupan Gita**, particularly in 4th canto, Bhima Bhoi while defining the nature and qualities of Brahman has mentioned in one place -

"He is the yogi, the one who has
renounced and has attained the Divine.
He is also the bhogi, the one who enjoys."

Thus Brahman of Mahima Dharma is personified. He is Mahima Gosain, the founder of Mahima Dharma.

Philosophy is something different. Mahima Gosain is taken as Mahima himself. He is Nirguna (without attributes), Niskama (without desire), Nirmoha (without attachment). He is always and ever eternal (Nitya). He is Brahma. No veda and Vedanta have been able to define Brahma. Not through shastras or learned discourse one can get into to the awareness of the Divine. Brahma remains beyond the scope of reason, logic and knowledge.

He is attainable only through an intense craving like the craving of the child for the mother.

He is the ever-graceful, all merciful and is prepared to excuse all our sins only if we seek His blessings and grace whole heartedly and give up all ego.

In Brahma Nirupana Gita Bhima Bhoi writes as follows -
"Jesaneka kshudha trusa chhanti benimurti,
Eka pakhuda gotika hrude phutichhanti - 101
Sehi rupe patipatni eka Brahme Jata,
Bhinnabhinna je kariba kula Jiba hata - 102
Brahma bhagatire au barna veda nahin,
Je veda kariba kumbhi narkare padai - 103
Guru duaraku sarbe atanti samana,
Stiri ba purusha tahin nahin bada sana." - 104

(Brahma Nirupana Gita, ch- XI)

Man or woman makes no difference, neither of them is superior nor inferior. They are equal. Mahima or Brahma is the one, only one from whom emanate humanity. Therefore, mankind is one. There is no difference in man and woman in Brahma bhakti. All are welcome to Gurudwara.

Again he says-
"Stiri purusha duhinki gadhiachhi
Jodia swarupadekha
Dwitiya Jatiru tini Jati nahin
Sujane kara viveka'" - 14

(Stuti Chintamani - Boli - 70)

Brahman has created man and woman. Brahman has not created caste system. So if you count caste, there are only two castes in the world i.e., man and woman.

Bhima Bhoi's **Chautisa** Consisting 41 lyrics expresses all the idealism, and aspirations of his great mind and at the same time faithfully analyses the philosophical and mystical thoughts of the Mahima cult.

In the 9th and 10th chautisas, we read the dialogue between the poet and Alekha Swami and through that he exposes the morbid cynicism and fanaticism of his age. Alekha assures him that he would rescue the distressed world and save the afflicted devotees. In tum, Bhima appeals to all to dedicate themselves unconditionally to Mahima Gosain to come over the sufferings.

In the Chautisas, Bhima expounds the philosophy of Jiva and Parama - the fervent attempt of Jiva to meet and be one with Parama.

In the Chautisas, Bhima Bhoi has depicted the sinful and immoral practices of the age and he warns the people to get prepared for the last Judgement of Mahima Gosain in a heavenly assembly attended by all the Gods, siddhas and devotees.

He has further asserted that Mahima Gosain was the embodiment of the great Sunya Brahma and that Joranda is the

visible manifestation of the void region. He has asked the people not to disregard the Guru, the Jogis and the Sanyasis of the Mahima faith nor also to disrespect the scriptures and the Gitas, and to relinquish such low practices as Varnasrama dharma, the idol worship and the like.

The BHAJANA songs of Bhima Bhoi like those of Mirabai, Tulsidas, Tukaram and Kabir are of great spiritual and literary value and those are marked by deep human interest and philosophic beauty. The transcendental and all absorbing power of Mahima is emphasised in Bhajanas. Bhima has asked to dedicate and surrender with profound devotion and faith of the unqualified Brahma and advises us to control the senses.

In **Nirveda Sadhana** we find dialogue between Mahima Gosain, the founder of Mahima cult and Govinda baba, the first disciple of Mahima Dharma Mahima Gosain has explained to Govinda baba the essentials of the religious path of Mahima Dharma and has removed his doubts.

The essence of Mahima Dharma has been emphasised as the path of "nibrutti" (detachment) and not praburtti (attachment). The external symbols of Sandal wood paste mark, flowers, Tilak or sacred thread are unimportant. What is important is to live a pure and simple life. One can achieve the Brahman if inside the soul there is "Nirbeda Sadhana" i.e., great devotion and austere action which does not even depend on the vedas.

In **Sruti Nisedha Gita**, Bhima Bhoi has pointed out that the complete surrender at the feet of Alekha alone can attain salvation. Gods and rituals can not help the attainment of such salvation.

In **Adi-Anta Gita** it is explained that the essence of sexual activity and the relationship between man and woman are as parallel to what happens to the soul, the individual being in its quest for supreme deliverance by surrendering itself to the Lord.



IS MAHIMA DHARMA A FORM OF CRYPTO-BUDDHISM ?

In the year 1911 two works of N.N.Basu appeared as follows.

1. "The modern Buddhism and its followers in Orissa" - Calcutta - 1911
2. The Archeological Survey of Mayurbhanj Vol.-I Calcutta, 1911

N.N. Basu for the first time pointed out the link between the doctrines of Mahima Dharma and medieval Vaishnavism in Orissa in the above books.

He interpreted the philosophy of the Panchasakha of Orissan Vaishnava sect as a hidden form of Buddhism. He also expressed that Mahima Dharma can also be considered as a modern form of crypto-buddhism.

M.N. Basu has given the following main points of support of his view.

1. The fact that Mahima Gosain, the founder of the Mahima sect is also called Prabudhha Swami.
2. The idea of the equality of all men in relation to God found in Mahima Dharma.
2. The rigid monastic organisations and some of its ritualistic details.

But Biswanath baba has refuted the charges in a pamplet in which he has shown that Mahima Dharma is very different from Buddhism even though some of the rituals only partially are the same as they exist in Buddhism.

Except that both Buddhism and Mahima Dharma have same kind of a monastic system, there is indeed very little common to both. Fundamentally while Mahima Dharma believes in Param Brahma, Buddhism does not even mention God or Brahma. (x)

As per Miss A.Eschmann, "The idea of an equal possibility of accession to the absolute is not only Buddhistic but is also a prominent feature of Bhakti. The fact that Mahima Swami is also called Prabudha or even Budha does not prove that he is held to be

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(x) Vide note to Philosophy of Mahima Dharma by Srimati Bani Basu in "Satya Mahima Dharma" page - 8

the Budha of Buddhism. The idea of Budha as an avatara of Visnu is largely found in the Purnas.(xx)

P.Kukharjee in his work "History of Medieval Vaishnavism in Orissa" has shown in detail that the Panchasakha can not be regarded as Buddhists or Cryptobudhist as it represents a very peculiar and typically Orissa Vaishnava theology in which Buddhistic elements were taken up and happily melted with what we undoubtly have to consider as a peculiar, but nevertheless, true Hindu-Vaishnava sight.

MAHIMA DHARMA : A SYNTHETIC RELIGION

Orissa is the bedrock of many religions and philosophical currents and cross-currents. It was the seat of two great religions i.e., The tantra religion, which is believed to have come from the Austries who are the first settlers of land and the religion of the soul, which in latter times was known as Jainism. Also Orissa was the seat of Buddhism and its different branches such as Bajrayana, Kalachakrayana and Sahajayana.

There can not be a dispute over the fact that the two contemporary philosophies like Buddhism and Jainism emerged as reactions against Brahminism which was pre-eminently the monopoly of the Brahmins. Their reactions were against the authority of the Vedas, the worship of idols and the dogmatic obedience to the religious rites.

The role of religions and philosophical thoughts has taken a different turn in the history of Orissa like the Hegelian synthesis arrived at through the dialectical movement of thesis and antithesis, the Jagannath cult in Orissa is a synthesis of many culture.

(a) Buddhists believe that the sacred relic of Lord Buddha is preserved in Lord Jagannath.

(b) The Vedantis believe that the Lord Himself is the Brahman incarnate as He is shapeless and indescribable.

(c) The Jain-followers take it for granted that He is their reality.

(d) The Vaishnabas take Him as Lord Vishnu.

If we take into account the Orissa of earlier 10th century, it would be seen that Britishers had already touched the sacred soil and Christianity had already in its sway.

(xx) "Spread, organisation and cult of Mahima Dharma" at Page 11 of the book "Satya Mahima Dharma"

If Jagannath cult can be taken as the thesis, Christianity can easily be taken as its antithesis.

On one side there is the great Indian tradition and on the other there is a popular, easy going religion of the newcomers.

"Mahima Dharma" appears just at this religious cross road where East and west pole apart.

It can be marked that the religious rudiments of Christianity is not completely absent in Mahima cult.

It may be remembered that, a synthesis is a special attitude of mutual relationship inspiring respect for one another and all the time emphasizing the essentials. A synthesis is never just an amalgam of externalities and mutual rejection and a deep seated bias are in no way its real style.

The synthesis arrived at in Mahima cult comprehends many opposites such as Brahminism and anti-Brahminism, Eastern and Western traditions, Hinduism and Islam. Inspite of all traditions the basic Indian tradition is not completely lost.

The cosmology of Mahima is also a synthesis of two opposite trends - the dualism of Samkhya and monism of Vedanta.

For the Advaitins, the world is an apparent modification of Brahma concealed by a consumic veil of illusions called "Maya".

'Maya' is trigunatmika.

For Samkhya thinkers, the cosmos is an evolutionary outcome of two opposite forces i.e., Purusa and Prakriti. Prakriti is the material cause which undergoes a real modification is trigunatmika i.e., a composite of three gunas namely sattva-Rajasa and Tamasa. Bhima Bhoi's Stuti chintamani favours the same hypothesis. Such a hypothesis regarding cosmic order was present in the Upanishada and travelling through divergent philosophies is finally settled in the philosophical speculations of Mahima cult.

Mahima cult revolts against idol worship and the accompanying sacrificial rites. This attitude is not altogether new. Upanishadas declare that the sacrificial rites and idol worship is a floating boat. Sankaracharya, the greatest exponent of Vedanta could declare these to be ineffective. So also is the slogan of Mahanirvana Tantra. Mahima Dharma raised a revolt against idol worship of the Lord Jagannath.

Like the other systems of Indian thoughts, Mahima Darsana puts emphasis on the firm Indian belief in eternal moral order, i.e., law of Karma and its corresponding hypothesis of rebirth. However it speculates that the results of action and the cycle of birth and rebirth will come to a close after one attains salvation by the realisation of Mahima, the ultimate reality through Bhakti.

Shankara's Advaita Vedanta highlights absolute knowledge as the gaterway to Mokshya (salvation). It is significant to note that "Bhakti Marga" is mainly advocated by the upholders of "Saguna Brahma" and the Gyana Marga for the upholders of Nirguna Brahma. But 'Mahima' being a synthetic religion champions the cause of Bhakti inspite of its adherence to Nirguna Brahma hypothesis. Moreover the gyana element is not completely absent.

Thus Mahima religion is an unique synthesis since its uniqueness does not lie in merely placing together but in bringing up a complete harmony of the divergent philosophical and religious trends and exhibit the emergence of a new light which is a class of its own type. Mahima Dharma in incorporating all the higher values cherished by the past thinkers, e.g. compassion, love, tranquillity and detachment, and by giving a personal God in the Mahima Gosain himself, who is to be attained more through a fullness of heart, than through pedantic learning, met all the claims of a theistic religion, an outlook which was pressing upon Indian life so heavily since the advent of Christianity.(x)



(x) Based on an article on the same subject by Dr. N. Padhi

CONCLUSION

Mahima Gosain is the founder of Mahima Dharma. It is said that, Mahima Gosain assumed the human form in the early part of nineteenth century and appeared at Puri in 1826 only to re-emphasise the Advaita Darshan.

Like Christabda Mahimabda has been introduced from that date by the Mahimaites. Mahima Gosain preached his new found Mahima cult till his disappearance in 1876 A.D.

The Mahima era starts from 1826 A.D. Most sanyasis and devotees count their year as Mahimabda.

According to Mahima Dharma, Mahima Gosain is himself nirakara, Nirguna, Param Brahma. He is treated as Ajonisamvuta.

Bhima Bhoi, the Adivasi poet philosopher is called Adikavi (First poet) of the Mahima cult. His writings are treated as original, authentic and real. One can have reliance of a high order on his writings as foundation materials for the religion. Bhima Bhoi provides consistent, coherent and whole picture of the religion and its founder.

After Bhima Bhoi attempts were made to collect anecdotes, practices, stories, records etc., to develop systematic literature pertaining to the philosophy of the religion. Biswanath baba declares that Mahima religion is as old as the Sanatan Hindu Dharma. He had examined the various practices, faiths and concepts of the religion in the light of the Upanisads, shrutis etc. and termed its philosophy as "Visuddha Advaita Brahma Vada".

Inspite of its close affinity with the Advaitavada of Sankara regarding the nature of the ultimate reality, Visuddha Advaita Brahmavad of Mahima dharma should not be confused with it. Though like Advaitavada, Visuddha Advaita Brahmavada rejects dualism in all its forms, 'Bhakti' has the first place in it and is recognised as the only means of salvation. Here Bhakti means the attraction of the pure mind to the ultimate reality. Bhakti being deepened destroys the mind and leads to oneness with non-dual Param Brahma.

Mayavada of Sankara has no place in Mahima Dharma. In place of maya it uses the word Mahima. "Mahima" of the Mahima cult is Param Brahma Himself in his wonderful power of creation. It is not the sakti of Param Brahma.

Mahima-vada takes the ultimate reality not as Sunya like Buddhism but as Sunya Brahma.

It is argued that the philosophy of Mahima religion is pure non-dualism (Visuddha Advaitavada) in as much as the world is not created by Maya which is a second principle in addition to the Brahman of Advaitavedanta. The world is created not by another principle in addition to ultimate reality but through the grace of one ultimate being who is beyond all categorisation.

Also it is argued that it is an independent religion in as much as it does not believe in image worship nor does it accept the caste system of the Hindus.

"Mahima religion, it is argued, is different both from Hinduism and Buddhism, in as much as, it believes in mass confession, mass prayer and community dinner (gosthi pangata) once in a year in a grand annual congregation.

But after careful study and observation of the philosophy of Mahima cult we come to conclusion that, Advaita Vedanta of Sankara does not become dualistic just because it talks of the world being created by the power of Maya of Brahma. Mahima philosophy does not come under pure non-dualism because of its claim that the world is created by the Mahima (Grace) of Alekha.

If Avidya (maya) is argued to be another principle other than Brahma, then why not take Mahima to be equally another principal of Brahma ? (xx)

In conclusion it may be said that, Mahima religion is a reformist movement within the sanatan Hindu-fold.

It is a revivalism of the Vedantic thrust and a reformist movement with its centre in the rural area of Orissa and with the rural folk whose wisdom dwells within non-literate forms.

Mahima Dharma is the last protest of the saints against the established Hindu religion. It is not a Budhistic movement, neither had it to do any thing with the Vaishnava way of worship, it did not believe as a religion in getting the sanction of the king to be able to survive and flourish and it proclaimed an open revolt against the externalist obsessions in religion. It flourished out of the courts, out of the influence of the king's mace, flouted the superiority of the Brahmins and registered most of its followers from the lowliest and the down trodden in society.

It was an effort to give to those who stood at the lowest in a status-infested society a real sense of human dignity and sought to raise them up as equals and devotees.

The movement continues to live mostly as a vestige of an alternative to what it and as an indication of what might be. (x)

(x) Sri Chittaranjan Das : Mahima Dharma and Bhima Bhoi (A glimpse into Oriya Literature - p-157.)

(xx) Prof. G. Mishra in his forward to "Mahima Dharma Darshna" - 1972

APPENDIX - 1

Personal symbol and subjective experience in Mahima Dharma - Dr. S. Patel

Mahima Dharma is fundamentally a bhakti-cult with a philosophical bent of Visudhadvaita-Brahmavada and as such has close affinity with Advaitavada of Sankara. Mahimites have close affinity with that of Spinoza's "Amor intellectualis del-the intellectual love of God. To love God is to see the truth, and to see the truth is to love God.

To quote Erdman (1892), "This amor intellectualis is nothing else than love for truth...." So Mahima Dharma advocates 'jnana' as the only means to salvation; attraction for the pure mind towards the ultimate truth-the Param Brahma. Hence, there is no antagonism between jnana and bhakti in Mahima Dharma, rather the two are the two sides of the same coin.

In essence, Mahima dharma nourishes man with the 'protein' in its kernel for his growth into right manhood with a capacity to grasp the Truth and at the same time inspires him to use the energy supplied by its 'carbohydrate' for mitigating the sufferings of his fellow being.

According to Obeyeskere (1981), "personal symbols" are not entirely idiosyncratic; they play an important role as devices by which human process, assimilate, and otherwise metabolise the cultural code. Further more, such personal symbols form the infrastructure which contributes to the development of continuity of the cultural system.

The aim of this paper, from comparative religion point of view, is to analyse some specific religious symbols of Mahima Dharma, so as to reveal to the process whereby Hindu cultural patterns and symbol systems are put back into the melting pot of consciousness and refashioned to create a culturally tolerated set of religious practices (codes).

Bhima Bhoi, the poet-philosopher in a tribal (Kondha) setting, has been able to compartmentalise the bulk of tribal, Hindu, Buddha philosophy into one, that is "mahima Dharma", keeping in mind the thrust of 'purity and pollution'; with craft and religion; deities and devotees; and heaven and earth as well.

Man is a symbolising, conceptualising, meaning-seeking animal. The aim of interpretation of symbol is to explain the concrete by reference to the abstract; the visible by the invisible; and to extract from the concrete its hidden meaning for an understanding of the abstract.

Symbols are not only economical and more abstract than words, they can also be made to conform to rules which allow of no irregularities. As a universal human process, symbols represent ideas and meanings of concealment and revelation.

The Mahimites have the characteristic symbols: such as The circular palm-leaf fan; long hair; manner of prayer (Saran). These symbols are analysed below.

Whether the symbol of circle appears in primitive Sun-worship or modern religion, in myths or dreams, in the mandals drawn by Tibetan monks, in the ground plan's of cities, or in the spherical concepts of early astronomers, it always points to the single most vital aspects of life - its ultimate wholeness. The circle is the representation of a unified multiplicity, and at the same time, it is the symbol of Unity, since we cannot conceive of unity without the ingredient of multiplicity. Beyond all this, the Circle indicates to us not only outer creation, but that which is its very breath and essence; the substance of the entire Manifestation, and thus it is for us the closest symbolic representation of consciousness, and of Love.

The long hair symbolises a synthesis between femininity, orality and nuptial union. It raises a type of image that reinforces a particular value among people.

A superb sculpture of Shiva, in the Hindu temple of Elephanta, shows three faces of the God; on the right his male profile displaying virility and will power; on the left, his female aspect-gentle, charming, seductive-and in the centre, the sublime union of the two aspects in the magnificent head of Shiva-Maheswar, the Great Lord, radiating serene tranquility and transcendental aloofness. The Eastern mysticism affirms that such union of male and female modes can be experienced only on a higher plane of consciousness where the realm of thought and language is transcended and all opposites appear as a dynamic unity.

Prayer (Saran) is a routine work along with certain postures, prescribed, that is strictly adhered to. To mention the one, it is flat stretching up of the whole body on the ground-like that of Dharana (Therapeutic Temple Sleep).

Sarana (Dharana) is usually for the emotionally depressed and disturbed people. Through the process, they not only perform an act of purification, but also try to escape from the pressures of caste, village, community and kin. The individual is vulnerable and becomes a centre, where cosmic forces clash. The principle is practised in Mahima Dharma, the purpose being, to bring the individuation process into reality, one must surrender consciously to the powers of the unconscious, instead of thinking of what one should do, or of what is generally thought of right, or of what usually happens.

This is simply a routine religiousity of institutional faith-like Sunday Church-going; decking and feeding the idol that has brought in desacralisation.

This is in parllance with the aesthetic Satre, accepting imperatives of authenticity as demanding as 'in any true religion and the godless Camus, whose compassion was almost Buddhist.

Prayers are offered only at day dawn and day dusk, with bare necessity of cloth on body. That too, the robe of red-ochre colour. May be, due to the ultra-violet rays at the time of prayer in open field.

When valid data accumulation proceeds, then mental phenomological inquiry begins. Along with a direct, immediate, and intutive apprehension of the object domain of Mahima Sect, we can aptly quote the following :

"According to phenomology, if one directly inquires into mental act-an image, a symbol, a word, as one actually uses it-one will find that it intrinsically possesses intentionality on meaning; it has a native form or structure; and it is semiotic or symbolic" (Wilbur, 1982)

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APPENDIX-2

REPORT OF THE ORIGIN OF MAHIMA DHARMA BY THE COMMISSIONER OF ORISSA DIVISION

(P.P. 2-6, Proceeding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, January, 1882)

The Secretary received letter from the under Secretary of the Govt. of Bengal forwarding a copy of letter from the Commissioner of the Orissa Division, reporting on the origin and growth of the sect of Hindu Dissenters who profess to be the followers of Alekha.

The Commissioner of the Orissa Division writes :-

(1) The founder of the sect is said to have been one Mukunda Das. He lived for a long time in Puri as an Achari Vaishnava, and was known as the Dhulia Babaji from the fact of his daubing his body with ashes.

(2) About thirty years ago he left Puri and came to Dhenkanal one of the tributary state of Cuttack, where he selected as his dwelling-place the Kapilash hills near a shrine of Mahadev. During the first twelve years of his residence at Kapilash, Mukunda das lived on fruits and accordingly was known as the Phalahari Babaji. The next twelve years was passed on milk and water which secured him the Cognomen of Kshira-nirahari.

"During his sojourn at Kapilas, he was known to be a devout worshipper of the local idol, and took much pains in improving the place by cutting the jungle, making gardens, looking after the Bhog or sacred food of the idol, and taking care of the pilgrims who visit the hills periodically. This procured him the respect of the mother of the late Maharaj of Dhenkanal, who supplied his food. He gradually succeeded in securing the respect of the people of the surrounding villages, and the popular belief that he was in secret com-

munion with the idol and could successfully intercede with it on behalf of its votaries. The currency of the belief was farther facilitated by the fact of his taking special care of the sick people who resorted to Kapilas for the benefit of their health, and very generally succeeded in getting it restored, and his visiting the temple at the dead of night while every one had retired to rest.

(3) After remaining at Kapilas, for several years, and finding that he had sufficiently established his reputation and secured the respect of the people, Mukunda Das left the place and began to preach that Mahadev and the other idols worshipped by the Hindus was nothing else but stone and wood, and that the worship of these destructible articles was useless and of no avail, that the creator of the universe was Alekh or Mahima (which literally means "glorious") a spiritual being without form, omni present and omniscient, and that he alone could hold communion with him and get his prayers granted. He eschewed his Kaupin (waist-cloth) and Kanthi (Wooden beads worn round the neck), the two distinctive features in the garment of a Vaishnava, and wore Kumbhipat (the bark of a tree called Kumbhi) to cover his nakedness.

(4) From Kapilas, Mukunda Das went to Puri where he remained for sometime in a hut on the sands near the temple of Loknath Mahadev. He next came to Daruteng in the Government state of Khorda in Puri where he built a tungi (a place of worship), and commenced to propagate the new doctrine. It was at this place that Mukunda Das was defined and began to be addressed as the Mahima Gosain. It appears that one Gobinda das was his first and Narasing Das his second disciple; others followed their example, and in course of time all these followers dispersed on all sides for the propagation of the new doctrine, shortly after a place of worship was established at Malabeharpur in Killah Banky: other places were opened in some of the remaining tributary states as well as in Sambalpur, Puri and Cuttack. At some of these places of worship, the Mahima Gosain gave large feasts, which were numerously attended. In 1875 in the month of Kartic on the day of the full-moon, a fair was held at Jacka in Dhenkanal, where a large number of the

followers of the Gosain assembled with such presents including valuable clothes, silver utensils, etc. It is said that the Babaji, or Swami as he was also addressed, offered these presents to the late Maharaja of Dhenkanal, and on his declining to accept them they were openly burnt in the fuel of the sacred Dhuni (fire kept up by religion mendicants). Thus in a few years the Mahima Gosain succeeded in making many disciples and followers, and on the days of the full-moon thousands of men and women from different distant parts of the country might have been seen wending their way to Tungis, with bangy loads of Ghee, Sugar and other valuable presents. It is said that at present the new faith is more popular in Sambalpur than in any other districts. It is confined mostly to the ignorant and illiterate people of the lower classes of the Hindu community, who were it is said, induced to adopt the new religion by hopes of enjoyment if they followed, and threats of perdition if they did not follow its precepts.

(5) The disciples of the Mahima Gosain inculcate self-denial and resignation to God as the sources of salvation; they do not aspire after worldly greatness of pleasure; extreme humility is one of their characteristics. They have no prescribed mode of worship except praise of God and prayer for his mercy. They recognise the Bhagavat, one of the religious books of the Hindus but interpret it in a different way from the Hindus. They have a malika or book of predictions, which treats of the incarnation of Alekh in the shape of Mahima Swami to redeem the world from sin and to indicate the way to salvation. Besides this they have got another book containing songs and dialogues interpreting the truth of Alekh. Most of these songs etc. are said to have been composed by Bhima Bhoi, a Khond, who is said to have been born blind, and afterwards endowed with sight by the Mahima Swami.

(6) The following extract from the report of the Manager of Dhenkanal throws some light on the real sentiment of the Swami.

"The man, who was at first called the Phalahari Gosain was afterwards designated Mahima Gosain, and was believed to be an incarnation of the Almighty god. In the year 1874, while I was on

tour in the interior of Dhenkanal, the founder of the Mahima or Alekha religion went with me from place to place and was with me for about a week, and I also saw him on several other occasion, but I never heard from him that he professed to be creator of the world as his disciples and followers believed him to be. From what I heard from him, I concluded that he believed that the creator of the world was a spiritual Being, omnipresent and omniscient, without any form, whom he called Mahima and also Alekh Prabhu and that he alone could communicate with the Alekh Prabhu and get down what he wished. He believed in the existence of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses but said that they were under his commands and that they were bound to obey what ever he wished them to do.

(7) The followers of Alekh Swami are divided into three sects :

"(i) The Kumbhipatias, (ii) The Konapatias, and (iii) The Ashritas.

"The First two have renounced the world and deem celibacy essential. The males are called 'Babas' and the females "Matas". The difference between these two sects is that a Kumbhipatia wears the bark of the Kumbhi tree, and a Konapatia pieces of rag. They beg from door to door, have no distinction of caste, and take their food only during the day-time at an open place beside a public road. They eat food cooked by people of any caste except the Raja, a brahman and a washerman, whom they considar as sinful beings in the world, and the Raja as he is responsible for the sins committed in his state, the Brahman as he accepts all sorts of gifts from sinful person, and the washerman as he washes sinful people's dirty clothes. They are not accustomed to live at any one place for more then one day and beg food more than once from the same house. They wear long matted hair and do not bathe. They turn their head towards the sun at the time of rising and setting, and postrate themselves several times to beg shelter and mercy of the Alekha Swami. The Asrits do not forsake the world, nor do they use kumbhipat or Kanapat like their confides, not use gerua basan or cloths coloured with gerua red earth like the Brahmacharis of the Hindus; they do not observe any Hindu ceremony or festival neither do they respect the Gods of Hindus. They perform their

marriage ceremony in a very simple way by the side of a public road or through fare; the bride puts a garland of flowers round the neck of the bridegroom as token of offering herself to him, and the friends and relatives of both loudly call upon their Alekh swami to protect the new pair in their career through life. Polygamy is prohibited among the Asrits. For any misconduct an offender is made to do penance by drinking a solution of cow dung. The Asrits consider the other two sects as their Gurus or Spiritual guides. The Tehsildar of Angul reports that new faith of Mahima has brought a change for the better on Pans of that killah, who are notorious for their thieving proclivities. Those who have accepted the new faith regard theft with abhorrence.

(8) In 1875, Mahima Swami who was believed to be immortal, died at Joranda in Dhenkanal, and the Tungis, together with goods chattels they contained, were sold as intestate property. Most of the followers of the new faith, finding that the swami was no better than an ordinary mortal disbelieved what he had inculcated and reverted to Hinduism. Those of his disciples and followers who had left their homes and friends and had been outcasted continue to practise the new faith they had embraced.

(9) At present there are only two places of worship in Dhenkanal, one at Joranda where Mahima Swami died and was interred, and another at Mahalpala where Narasing Das now lives. The Kumbhipatias resort to the former and the Kanapatias to latter of these places; they are reported not to be on good terms with each other. During the life time of Mahima swami, the Kumbhi patias and Kanapatias were not regarded as distinct sects. Any person who wish to adopt the new religion first become an Asrit, which literally means protected. He was not required to leave his house and friends, afterwards if he wished to forsake the world he was required to eat with every person without distinction of caste and to remain at one of the places of worship called tungis. In this noviciate, he was allowed to wear cloth and was therefore called Kanapatia. If after this any of Kanapatias was considered fit to be a Kumbhi Patia, Mahima Swami favoured him with a Kumbhipat

bark of the Kumbhi tree, and from that time he was prohibited to wear cloth.

(10) The followers of Mahima swami appears to have had no leader since his death, they are scattered through Gurjats of Orissa in the Chattisgarh Division of the Central Province in the regulation district of Orissa and in Ganjam, the adjoining district of the Madras presidency. The system has, however, taken more in Sambalpur than else where.

(P.P. 2-6, Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, January, 1882)